

OCTOBER

25 CENTS

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN



Memoirs of a Difficult Life, by **ANDRÉ MAUROIS**
Hauling West An epic novel of Conestoga wagon days east of the Mississippi, by **JOHN T. McINTYRE**
the author of "Steps Going Down."
Fame and Honor...Gold and Pearls
by **H. BEDFORD-JONES**

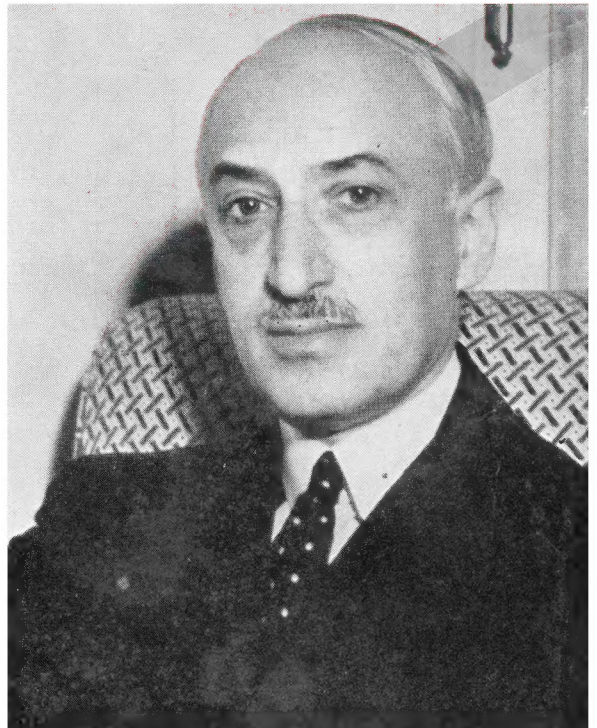
WHO'S WHO in this ISSUE

André Maurois

ANDRÉ MAUROIS is the son of an Alsatian manufacturer who moved to France after 1871. In spite of physical frailty, young André yearned for a military career, and with great difficulty gained admittance to the army. Later, he entered his father's mill, destined apparently to become a millionaire, but in the first World War he served as a liaison officer between British and French—and published his first literary work. It was an instant success and from that time on he became more the writer, less the manufacturer.

With "Ariel" and the works that followed, he won world renown. His friends included Poincaré, Briand, Clemenceau, Blum, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the present Queen of England. During the 1930's, he watched France's political unrest with growing unease. During these years also, he was elected to the French Academy, which he describes in fascinating detail.

Until the fall of France, he was French Official Eye-witness at GHQ of the British Field Force. When the end came, he crossed to the United States and has become a college professor here.



R. V. Gery

FOURTEEN years ago R. V. Gery, then a schoolteacher on the Saskatchewan prairies, ventured a story for competition in a Canadian magazine. The story concerned the Province of Quebec, of which, he says, he knew nothing, professional boxing, of which he knew even less, and was full of very bad French. Nevertheless the magazine bought the story—even awarded a prize for it; after that time he became a fiction-addict.

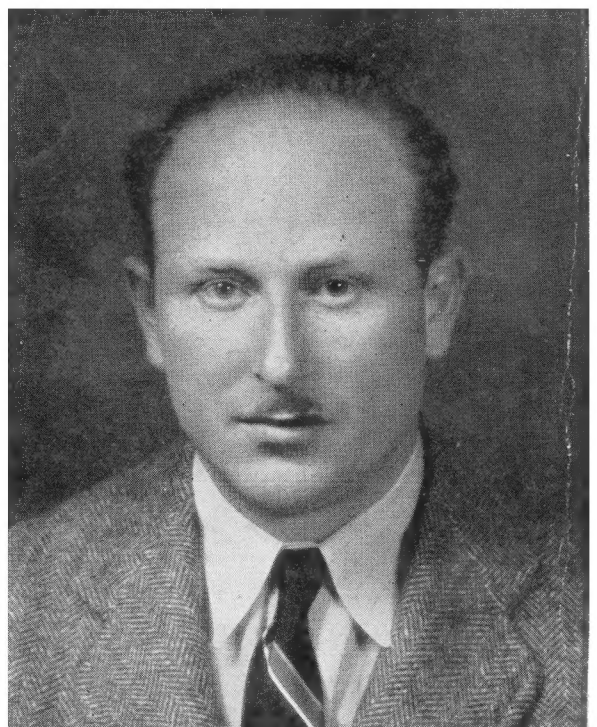
The picture was taken in his schoolteaching days. "My literary daughter informs me," he wrote of it, "that I'm not nearly so good-looking as I was. In about fourteen years' time you may see her in print. She has a certain smiling savagery which might carry her far."

George Armin Shaftel

ISET out originally to become a college teacher and to write plays. I did become a Teaching fellow in a great university, and I wrote plays while working for an M. A. Two of my plays won Little Theatre prizes. But at the same time, a short story I wrote won a magazine prize—and I turned to writing fiction and I've been at it ever since. Not for a dozen years did I write plays again. I had a number accepted by amateur groups over the country but never, to my knowledge, were these produced. One *was* produced but I didn't know about it until I got a letter from a man in Australia who wanted a copy of the play of mine he had seen produced in Detroit six months previously! I tuned in on Friday to hear my script, and learned that it had been produced the preceding Wednesday!

My training in scholarly research has helped me a great deal in gathering material for fiction. I write many historical stories. At present I am finishing a long historical novel dealing with the Conquest of California, to be brought out by Coward-McCann. Otherwise, the nearest I've come to teaching was the writing of a textbook, "Dynamics of Drama," first published in January of 1941, and now being re-issued in a second edition.

I grew up in the soft-coal country of Southern Illinois; moved to California when I was nineteen and have made it my home ever since. I'm married; and we have a year-and-a-half-old boy who has a prodigious appetite, prodigious lungs, and prodigious skill at making his parents do what *he* wants to do. And they love it.



BLUE BOOK

October, 1942

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Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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READERS' FORUM

THE GIRLS TOO LIKE BLUE BOOK

In the May, 1942, issue of the BLUE BOOK I was amused to find an ardent reader distressed by the fact that the ladies would not leave him alone to enjoy his one pleasure in life. Surely the little caption on the cover, "Stories of adventure for men by men" is not a taboo placed on the magazine forbidding the ladies to revel in the thrilling tales contained therein.

We girls who like BLUE BOOK, like it the way it is. There are many other places where we can find beauty hints and we look for them in those places. When we turn to BLUE BOOK we are looking for a little fun—a release from our daily routine. The spirit of quest, adventure and wanderlust exists in us as well as in the men and no other magazine I know of satisfies that spirit as entertainingly as does BLUE BOOK.

My father has been a devotee of your magazine for many years but it was not until about two years ago that, knowing I enjoy reading, Dad tossed the book at me and suggested I read it. I scoffed at the idea for I had heard all about that "for men by men" business and just figured it wasn't my line, but to please him, I finally read the story he mentioned—and I have been reading stories in it ever since.

Please, men, don't consider us intruders. It's your magazine, but I am sure you won't object if we borrow it once in a while.

Patricia Burns,
Cambridge, Mass.

ONE MAN'S PROBLEM

Please! You are breaking up my home. Right now, my wife, my aunt, and my mother-in-law are locked in deadly combat, fighting for possession of the latest issue of BLUE BOOK. I have no recourse except to go out and purchase another copy for myself. Does that solve my problem? It does not! On my way home, I drop into Wing Lee's Hand Laundry, to pick up my other shirt. Wing spots the object beneath my arm. His eyes glitter. A bony brown hand flicks out, and snatches the magazine from me. "Hoola-ee, hoola-ee!" Wing spouts. "Long time no see BLUE BOOKEE!" And, he flees to the rear of the store, and settles down amidst his steaming tubs, leaving me standing with a tickee, but no washee.

Really, you should do something so a guy wouldn't be in danger of mayhem every time he goes unguarded with a copy of BLUE BOOK in his hand.

Frank J. Ford,
Chicago, Illinois.

(Continued on third cover)

Hauling West

*A colorful novel of wagon-freighting life in the 1820's,
by the author of "The Man Who Forgot Three Years."*

by JOHN T. MCINTYRE

A TALL, bronzed young man on an old roan horse rode up the dusty turnpike and into the water-side town of Perth Amboy. It was late afternoon, and the roadside approaching the Horse and Bridle Tavern was ranked with huge freight-wagons. The horses, stripped of their harness, were munching their fodder and twitching their ears.

Perth Amboy was a growing place; the bay was crowded with vessels newly in from sea, many of which discharged their freights directly upon her wharves. There were smaller craft, schooners, brigs and barges, also excited little steamers, constantly passing to and from New York. Each day a fleet of wagons would take in the westbound freights swung ashore at Amboy, stow them in their wide bellies; then, each loaded with many tons, they would take the Burlington Road, commerce's chief artery between New York and Philadelphia.

Opposite the tavern, a group of men were jacking up the front of a wagon. The young rider got down from his horse and spoke to them.

"Could you direct me to the warehouses of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy?" he asked.

"They are right on ahead," said one of the men. "On the waterfront. You'll see the name on the buildings."

The young rider thanked the man, put his arm through the bridle and moved toward the tavern; but as he was going, a big, black-browed man, who seemed to be a sort of overseer, said:

"You wouldn't be wanting a race for that animal, would you, stranger?"

The others grinned at this, for the old nag was shambling along with its head wearily hanging.

"Not just now," answered the young man good-humoredly. "He still needs some working on. But we might fix up a quarter race sometime if you'd care to run against him."

The grins grew into laughs, and the black-browed man didn't seem to like it.

"You're one of them kind that talk smart, aint you?"

"What else am I to do when I get among quick-spoken people like you?" the tall young man said over his shoulder.

He didn't wait to hear the next offering of the overseer, for a stableboy had come forward to take the roan.

"Give him a good rubbing," said the young man. "Feed him some corn and hay; and not too much water. He's had a hard day, and that off leg is a little stiff. I find hot water always thaws it out."

"He's been a good one in his time," said the hostler. "And he's got some of it left. I'll treat him well, Mister."

The Horse and Bridle Tavern was what was known in those days, only a few years after the second War for Independence, as a wagon-stand. It was frequented only by wagoners and others engaged in handling freights along



the turnpike; travelers by coach were received at a better class of inn called stage-stands. The young rider sat down at the long table and called for ale and bread and cheese. And the stout, good-natured-looking landlord talked with the young man as he ate. "You are a stranger here, I think," he said. "And I'd say from some distance."

"From back in Pennsylvania. Wagoning into the West, over the mountains."

"I thought you had the look of the road about you," the landlord said, "but I felt sure I hadn't seen you in Amboy."



"You would know the firm of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy, I suppose?" the traveler said.

"Oh, very well. They are the oldest Amboy people in the trade. A prosperous house—on land and water; and that's a thing you seldom see nowadays."

"Maybe you'd be acquainted with Simon Abernathy?"

"Indeed, I am. And my father knew him before me. In his time Simon was an able man; I'd say no one knew the ways of the road as he did."

"In his time?" the young man repeated. "He's no longer what might be called able?"

The host shook his head.

"Oh, no. He's quite old now. And his health has left him. Old Mr. Abernathy was once a grand build of a man; there were none of his wagoners that could match him in a trial of strength. But he's sunken greatly in late years, poor man. The last time I saw him, which was some few weeks ago, he was only a shadow of what he had been."

"But he still keeps a hand upon the business?"

"He'd always manage to do that. Years ago, back in General Washington's time, he kept his pack-trains on the road between Amboy and Burlington, often in the



very teeth of the King's troopers. He's of the kind that'd manage his business as long as he could step."

"You think he'd not be the kind that'd be easily frightened off any way he'd chosen, then?"

"Not old Simon!" The host of the Horse and Bridle was quite positive. "At least, not the Simon that was some years ago." The man then lowered his voice. "But I suppose it does not do to be too sure of what a man will do when his strength's gone and when his mind isn't what it had been. I've seen what happens at such times."

THE young man ate his bread and cheese and drank his ale; while he did so, he thought of what had just been said; he thought of a letter, done in a shaking hand, which was at that moment in the breast pocket of his jacket. It had followed him by mail-cart, by horseman, through canals and, packed with others, upon the backs of men who trudged up the steep mountain-sides. And it had finally overtaken him as he walked beside his six-horse team, with its chiming bells, upon a far crest of the Alleghanies.

A letter written by a frightened old man! One whom he'd had no memory of, though he must have seen him when a child. A letter in a shaking hand. . . .

"Denis!" That's how the paper began. "Owen is dead, I know. But you, who are now a man grown, are still strong and alive; and I'm calling to you. What has come to me in my old age, God alone knows. But I need help, sorely. I need someone I can speak to, someone who will understand and not believe what I say is the raving of a mind that has stopped thinking clearly, and is frightened as a child often is when it finds itself alone."

"I don't know, Denis, what your father has told you. For he was bitter in his words to me when I saw him last, more than twenty years ago. And to that I'll add that my sayings were the same to him. But no matter what you've heard of me from Owen, I ask you to forget them, and come immediately to my help."

And then his grandfather's name. He had re-read the letter as he tramped beside the great wheels of his wagon. The old man was in deep trouble—that was plain.

He go to him! Pittsburgh, the end of his haul, was still three days away, but he couldn't delay so long as that.

So he called George Hickory, who was riding the near wheel horse, and said he must travel back toward the East.

"What, leave the wagon! And go back! You can't do that, Denis. It wouldn't—"

"Don't talk—listen," said Denis Abernathy. "Sometime tomorrow you'll meet Heffner on the road back with his wagon. Tell him I've had a letter, and I *must* go back. He'll understand."

"All right," said George. "But how are you going to make your way? You'll not be able to get on very fast if you walk."



"Keep away, Mule!"
cried the landlord.
"Don't do that!"

"I'll get a horse," Denis had said. "Anyway, don't worry about me, George. Keep the team going. When you meet Heffner, he'll tell you what else to do."

And now, at Perth Amboy, his journey's end, but with the feeling that the worst might still be ahead, the young man looked into the round face of the landlord of the Horse and Bridle.

"You think, then, that it's old age that's Simon Abernathy's complaint?"

"Some of it's that," replied the landlord. But he shook his head as he added: "But maybe not all. I can't but think that as strong a man as old Simon does not go to pieces so suddenly, just because of a few more years."

The two talked for some time. While the conversation was still under way there was outdoors the sound of wheels, and the thumping of hoofs on the stones.

"That will be someone in from Burlington," said the landlord. "If you'll excuse me, I'll see if they're for here."

HE hurried out. Denis, finishing his meal, heard loud voices and laughter; he rose, paid his score and went out. There was a carriage to which was harnessed a pair of sweating horses; these were rearing and prancing, frightened by the crowd of wagoners who had gathered around, jeering at the poor control of the young man who held the reins.

Denis spoke to the hostler to whom he'd entrusted his horse an hour before.

"Already saddled," said the man. "A little forage and some work on his legs has made a new horse of him."

There was a girl in the carriage, beautiful and dark-eyed and who seemed somewhat frightened at the bad manners of the horses and the noise of the rough crowd. The landlord, dodging about to keep from under the wheels, was speaking to her.

"No, young lady, this is not any inn meant for the traveling public. It's a wagon-stand, only. If the young man will drive on for another quarter-mile, you'll come to the President Monroe Tavern, where you'll find very comfortable accommodations."

"A quarter-mile!" shouted a loud voice. "That fat little fellah'll never get them horses that far. He don't know enough to drive a pair of rabbits around a barn."

It was the black-browed wagoner with whom Denis Abernathy'd had the passage of words sometime before. And as he spoke, he attempted to seize the heads of the frightened horses. More than ever they swerved and reared, threatening to upset the carriage.

"Keep away, Mule!" cried the landlord to the man. "Don't do that!"

The man turned, his heavy face full of anger.

"You 'tend to your cooking and drawing your ale," he said. "Leave horses to me."

Again he tried to grasp the bridles of the wild-eyed team; and this time Denis Abernathy shoved him aside.

"Get away from them," said the young man. "You're not dealing with wagon-horses now. A little more of this, and you'll have them jumping over the moon."

The stableman, who had by now brought up the roan, turned him over to Denis, and at once gave his attention to the frightened team. A quiet, confident approach, a soft patting of their necks and a murmuring of meaningless words, and they began to grow quiet.

Seeing that all was well, Denis took hold of his mount's bridle and was about to swing himself into the saddle; then suddenly a heavy blow struck him on the side of the head. He let go the bridle, staggering back. Then came a second blow, and he went down in the dust of the road.

He heard a sudden lifting of sound; dazed as he was, he saw a pair of powerful legs, and heavy dusty boots beside him. Almost at once came a brutal kick aimed at his head; instinctively he rolled out of the way. Then came another kick; his head was already clearing, and again he rolled out of the way. He could now see the man who had attacked him. It was the one the landlord had called Mule; and now, his face filled with rage, he was drawing back for still another kick. But he was seized by a dozen pairs of hands and dragged away.

Denis arose, dusted himself off with his hat and felt of the side of his head where the man's blows had landed. And while he was so doing, the carriage passed him, the horses now quieted and manageable. And he saw the girl look at him as it went by, her eyes filled with scorn. To her, he was one of the huddle of blackguards; she'd seen him down in the dirt, engaged in a brutal fight.

CHAPTER TWO

DENIS ABERNATHY saw the wharves and docks of Amboy a little later when he rode along the waterfront. There were dusky little steamers fussing here and there; tall ships lay in the docks and at anchor in the bay. There were all manner of craft loading and unloading. Trampling horses, mules and oxen, were everywhere; the broad iron tires of the freight-wagons ground against the stones.

At some little distance he saw a stretch of low ware-houses, above which was the name of *Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy*. He rode through the traffic until he reached this range of buildings; then he dismounted, tied his horse and entered.

The counting-room was long and narrow; there were clerks at high desks; there were others at little windows overlooking the scales, and the entrances and exits for drays, barrows and other vehicles.

"Could I have a moment with Mr. Abernathy?" asked Denis of one of the clerks.

"I'm not sure he's here at this hour," said the man. "But I'll send word."

A porter was sent, and returned in a short space to say that Mr. Abernathy was in, and could be spoken with.

Denis was shown to the office, and there found a tall, gaunt old man, with hollowed temples and cheeks, whose lips were gray and whose hand shook as though with palsy. This was Simon Abernathy. And as his grandson stood before him, the faded old eyes remained fixed upon him.

"You're not Owen," he said, "though you have his look." There was a silence, and then he added in a surer tone: "And Owen is dead. You are Denis, his son."

The young man advanced to the writing-table at which the old man sat.

"Yes, Grandfather. It's Denis," he said, and his voice was gentle. "I've come in answer to your letter."

"Come nearer," Simon said. . . . "Still nearer. I don't see things as clearly as I once did. Stand straight before me." Slowly he searched the young man's face, feature by feature. He measured his height; he took account of the wide shoulders, the deep chest, the stalwart, swinging carriage. "Yes," he said, "you're Owen's son. I can see him in you all over again. He stood like you; he had a body like yours; and your strength I can see is the same strength he had when he was your age. Also," said old Simon, "you are Ann Craufurd's son. You have her features, and you have her eyes as truly as though she stood there looking at me."

He asked Denis to sit down, and the young man drew a chair to the side of the writing-table.

"I'm glad you're here," said Simon. "More glad than I can say. But I'll be fair: I will give you no false impressions: In all the years that have passed, I did not once think of you until one night a few months ago. I awoke from my sleep," he said, "and a fright was upon me. I lifted myself in my bed and cried out for Owen! And then," said the old man, "Dacre pushed open my door and came in, with a lighted candle in his hand."

"Who," asked Denis, "is Dacre?"

"He's the firm's general manager. Since a happening of three years ago, I've had my rooms in his house. As he stood looking at me he asked me what ailed me, and I said I'd had a bad dream."

"You called," Dacre said. "I was going down the passage and heard you. You called someone's name."

"It was my son's name," I said to him.

"Your son is dead," he told me.

"I sat looking at him," said old Simon Abernathy; "the light of the candle shone on his face, and he was smiling. And at that moment, strangely enough, Denis, you came into my mind. Like a flash, it was. I saw you, not as a child, but as you are now, grown and strong and able. And as I thought of you I said to Dacre:

"I know my son is dead. But *his* son is not."

"He held the candle up so he could see me more plainly."

"Owen's son?" he said to me.

"Now a swaggering big fella," I said. "Away in the western hills, and prospering."

"He kept looking at me, and there was surprise in his face; and at last he said to me was I at ease and comfortable? And when I said I was, he went out of the room, taking the candle, and closing the door behind him."

As Denis listened to this recital he'd felt a cold trickle in his blood; he saw the picture the old man described, the shadow-filled bedroom in that still time of night, the gaunt face, the bedclothes, perhaps, drawn up under the chin, the yellow candlelight falling upon the bed; a man standing beside it, smiling oddly.

"That was the first thought I had of you since you were a child," the old man told Denis. "And it was the next day I wrote the letter that has brought you here."

Old Simon leaned forward, a sort of hunger in his eyes; his big bony hands rested upon the edge of the table.

"Stand up once more," he said, "to your full height. I want to be sure that I've not been deceived in you." Denis stood up; the dim eyes again searched him, the hunger in them gradually slackening.

"Yes, yes. You are Owen over again. But there is something of me in you too. The frame you have is a thing I gave you both." He paused for a moment, still gazing; and there was wonder in his voice when he spoke again. "But the more I look, the more I see the light of your mother in you."



"Tell Heffner I've had a letter, and I must go back East. He'll understand," said Denis.

His gesture bade the young man sit down again; and when they were settled once more, he went on: "When I saw you, in my mind that night, with Dacre there looking at me, I saw endurance in you, a toughness maybe Owen himself never had; and while I was writing the letter, I hoped my vision was true."

"In that letter," said Denis, "you called for help. You were frightened."

"There was a day," the grandfather said, "when the man who'd say *fright* to me would be taking his life in his hands. But when I wrote those pages, I was frightened indeed. On many days before I was the same; and many afterward."

Denis looked at him quietly. "Why?" he asked.

The old man was silent for a time. At last he said:

"There are many things at work upon the edge of my mind that I do not see plainly. Creeping things, silent, and having that in them that brings weakness to a person who, like myself, is well gone in years. When I'm plagued by uneasy thoughts, I often consider what I was, and what I now am, trying to get an answer to my state of mind. But I cannot, for the answer is not there."

"If it's not in yourself, it's in someone else," said Denis. "There is an answer for everything, if you search carefully. If you do not find it in yourself, it's in those who are around you."

The old man smiled wanly.

"A good thought," he said. "You have wits, Denis, which is another thing I'd hoped of you." His voice lowered as he went on: "Those who are around me! There are a great many—though most of them don't matter. But there are

my partners; they matter a great deal. Often of a night, when I'm alone, I sit and think of them."

"Are the Moreaus and the Descoings still in the firm?" asked Denis.

"Not the originals. They have passed away. I now have their sons, and a few of their grandsons. However, I seldom see any but the Descoings."

HE told Denis the Descoings were French. They had been merchants and shipowners in L'Orient until the Revolution drove them out; and in leaving France, they had been clever enough to take with them their vessels and all their money they could lay hands on. They established themselves in New York, and being shrewd traders, were very successful.

"From the beginning," said Simon Abernathy, "my pack-trains carried their merchandise across New Jersey. They increased their fleet of vessels sailing from these ports, and then they joined with the Moreaus of New Orleans, who were traders in the gulf ports and among the islands. And shortly after this they came to me," said the old man. "At that time I had three hundred pack-horses and mules. And the number of my wagons was growing. I had come to be a power on the roads, and they wanted what was under my control. I joined them; and year by year I built up the land transportation until we had all trade bearing westward in our hands."

The earnings of the company were very heavy; its prosperity was uninterrupted for fifteen years; and then, though Simon didn't mark it at once, it began to slacken.

The number of the firm's ships operating out of New York grew fewer; the hauling over the roads shrunk steadily. The books began to show startling changes.

Complaints came continuously from New Orleans, for the Moreaus' branch of the business suffered in the same way. The family was not getting the returns they should. The company as a whole, they said, was not supporting them with sufficient activity. Other people were coming into the trade; schooners, brigs and such craft were beginning to be considered slow and undesirable; steam vessels were pushing into that region, and nothing was being done to keep the new people in their places.

"An unseen something seemed to be at work," said Simon Abernathy. "Everything that had been active and customary and prosperous began dying down; a numbness was creeping upon us. It was five years ago that I began to see plainly that I was being pushed off the road, and for the first time I realized I was an old man. Strangers had appeared and were hurrying past me."

He was aroused by this, he said, and went vigorously to work. Things improved, but even with that, he saw disintegration. He spoke to the Descoings; he recommended certain steps. There was a rousing of agents, of ship captains, of representatives in foreign ports; letters were written, regulations amended, consultations held.

"I watched all this being done," said old Simon. "But I had no understanding of it. I marked each step, expecting things to mend, but they did not. Then suspicion began to take a place in my mind. There were things going on underneath that I knew nothing of, things I was not meant to know anything of. I felt the company was being plundered. By the Descoings!"

"I see," said Denis, leaning back in his chair. "And what then?"

"I considered matters as best I could; and then I let it be known that my health was none too good. I took a ship and went south; and at New Orleans I visited the Moreaus."

THE Moreaus, he said, were a handsome people, leisurely and kindly, disturbing themselves little about anything. They had a house in the city that was like a palace; they had another situated in the midst of a huge plantation; the company offices, in which they appeared only infrequently, were most splendidly appointed.

"They are mostly French," said Simon Abernathy, "but there is a strain of Spanish too. François Moreau was the eldest of them, a man of something above fifty years. And it was he who attended to the business."

François Moreau was carefully sounded by old Simon; and it was seen almost at once that he was confused and uneasy. Trade was not at all what it had been. Ships came and went. Cargoes were received and discharged. Books were balanced in proper season. But there was no money!

Moreau spoke of the other shipping houses. They were quite venturesome and enterprising people. The Moreaus had always liked competition; it was a thing that gave a sporting savor to business. But now they were losing place and money, and seemed unable to stem the decline.

"I need a great deal of money," François Moreau had said. "I have an expensive family; I have my establishments to keep up. In this city the Moreaus have always been people to be considered. But," he said, "though I am engaged in what should be a profitable business, I have fallen deeply in debt. I owe everyone. At this moment, if my creditors should insist upon payment, I'd be bankrupt."

Simon Abernathy ceased speaking, and Denis said:

"Then he too was not satisfied? He too was suspicious?"

"Much more so than I was," said Simon. "He had greater need for money than I; and perhaps because of that, he was more positive in his fears."

The young man looked at the shrunken frame of the old one—at the hollow temples and cheeks, the pale lips, the dim eyes.

"When you mention the word *fear*," said Denis, "I go back to your letter to me. When you wrote that you were afraid, I did not understand it was a fear having to do with your business. It seemed deeper than that."

"I wrote to you," said Simon, "not because of loss, or because I was bewildered by the queerness of the things going on around me." He leaned across the table, his voice now at a whisper. "It was more than that. I was afraid for my life."

"Your life!" The eyes of Denis opened wide. Old Simon was shaking; his gray lips had turned blue.

"When the day came," he said, "that I'd made up my mind what I'd thought were the firm's troubles were only the troubles of Moreau and myself, and that Henri Descoings did not share them, I went to him at once. He sat at his writing-table and listened to me while I charged him with robbing me. I charged him with a falseness that I'd not thought anyone would be guilty of. I said to him that he sat there before me with a weight of filthy plotting in his mind that any man with a trace of decent feeling would sink under."

"What was his reply to that?"

"He looked at me, and smiled. He told me that for some time he'd thought I was losing my senses, and now he was sure of it. He said a good deal more, always smiling and sneering. But underneath the smile, underneath the sneer and the carelessness of him, I could see that my words had struck him more deeply than he'd admit."

Simon Abernathy mopped the cold sweat from his face and hands with a big, patterned kerchief.

"I can see," he said to Denis, "that you're wondering what came afterward—what he did, what he said in the days that we have been together under this roof. He did nothing different—that I could see. He said not a word to me about what had passed between us. One who knew nothing of the matter would have thought him just as he'd been in the many years past, since the names of Descoings, of Moreau, and Abernathy, had gone up over the wharves, warehouses and offices of the new company."

"There was nothing at all different that you could see?"

"Nothing. But there was much, as before, that I couldn't see. There was a-many things craftily placed upon me that were meant to burden me down. But"—with a trembling pride—"I stood up under them. And," the old man said, "seeing that they could not break me in that way, it was then they made their first attempt upon my life."

Denis Abernathy looked at his grandfather, his eyes narrowed, his lips shut tightly.

"One night," said old Simon, "as I was here with some of the account-books of the company, going over them to see if there was any trace of a misleading thing, an ounce ball shattered the glass of that window"—pointing—"and found itself a bed in the frame of yonder door. It's still there," said Simon, his voice cracking and his breath short. "It was only the matter of an inch or so, and it would have laid me on the floor here, with my heart stopped, and no life in me at all."

"You say that was the first attempt," said Denis, amazed and stirred. "What more was done?"

"Three times after that there was an effort to take me from this place for good. Time was, when I'd welcomed such a thing," said Simon. "I'd welcomed it with a weapon in my hand. But an old man is not fitted for such adventures. And instead of relish, I found a fear growing in me. The second attempt made upon me was in the narrow way between this and the next building. In the dusk of a June evening. A knife, it was. Through the providence of God, I saw it and threw myself down, and so was saved. Twice after that, in the night, my house was broken into; in the first of these I was awakened by my chamber door opening. There was a heavy pistol upon a chair at my bedside. I seized it, and fired; I could hear running feet on the stairs, and then the sound of someone leaping from a window to the ground."

"The last time," said Simon, "I was taken by the throat of a night as I unlocked my street door and stepped into the hall. But I tore myself loose, and shouted. A man who chanced to be passing in the street came to my aid. It was after that my health broke, and I was forced to keep to my bed. Dacre, who is a kindly man, came to me, and said it was not right for me to continue to live with two frightened old servants in a place where I seemed to be at the mercy of any villain who chose to break in upon me. After that I went to live at Dacre's place," said Simon.

Denis, his elbows upon the table, his chin in his hands, asked many questions. Some of them the old man was able to answer; but over many having to do with the affairs of the firm of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy he shook his head. Most things having to do with the business were in such complete confusion, he said, that he wouldn't venture into any account of them.

"But," persisted Denis, "isn't there someone else with a knowledge of the matter?"

"There is," said the grandfather, "and I meant to speak of him. Cross into New York tomorrow and hunt out Counselor Thistlewater. His chambers are in South Street, only a little distance from Coffee House Slip. He knows most things about my business dealings; also, he knows that I sent for you. He was acquainted with your father; he'll know who you are as soon as he sets eyes upon you."

The young man asked some questions about the counselor; and in the hour or so that he remained, he asked much more: Did his grandfather now feel safe? Was there no immediate thing he could do to make sure of this?

But old Simon said no to everything.

"Go to one of the taverns and get yourself comfortable quarters," he said. "See Thistlewater in the morning. Listen carefully to his advice. He is a man to be trusted, and you can safely follow the way he'll point out to you. And as soon as you can, come see me again."

And then Simon asked about Owen, and he asked about Ann Craufurd. The questions were brief; and the answers to them were equally so. Denis had his hand upon the door-latch when old Simon said to him:

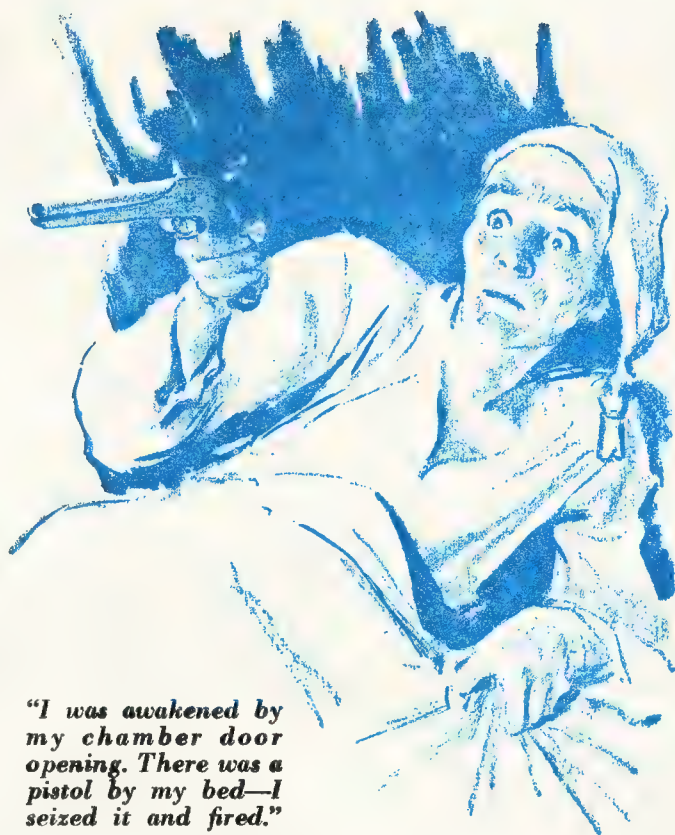
"One last word: Take a good deal of care. Do not venture too far into anything. Above all, have no contacts with the Descoings. The younger one is the most dangerous of the two; keep a distance between him and yourself at all times."

As Denis closed the door behind him and moved through the long counting-room, there was a powerfully built young man with a strongly marked, handsome face, striding up and down the floor. He wore corded breeches and polished boots, and carried a whip; he slashed at his boot-tops with this at every stride. He turned in his pacing and their eyes met. Instantly, Denis knew he'd seen him before, at a moment when he wore the same expression of fury.

But Denis did not wait for any words. He passed on and out of the place, and as he did so, he was aware of an animal-like, instinctive feeling. His scalp prickled electrically; he felt the short hairs on his neck lift like the hackle of a gamecock. He did not know who this man was or where he'd seen him, but he knew there was a hate between them that would last as long as life was in their bodies.

CHAPTER THREE

AT the Horse and Bridle that night Denis Abernathy, while waiting for his supper, sat reading a book he'd carried for some days in his jacket pocket. It was a stout little volume of small type: Walter Scott's "Lord of the Isles," a writing lately come to the Western country, though it was then a half-dozen years old. Denis had been fed on the poems of Scott by a Highland schoolmaster in a little log schoolhouse near to Pittsburgh. The ancient border ballads were known to him also; but the glamour and panoply of Scott caught and held his boyish fancy.



"I was awakened by my chamber door opening. There was a pistol by my bed—I seized it and fired."

Owen Abernathy had been determined Denis should have an education; he'd told the boy that had been his mother's most binding request before she died.

"I know," Ann Craufurd had said, "he'll grow up a man in your care. That he'll be strong and spirited. But you must have him at school. He mustn't be let come to manhood like one of the common horsemen of the turnpikes, knowing nothing and having no manners. Put him to a good school, Owen. He's a well-disposed boy as he is; but schooling will make him better."

Owen had told Denis this when he was twelve, and was going off to Philadelphia, where he'd stayed for five years in a Quaker academy.

"She had belief in you, and wanted to see you make something of yourself," Owen added. "So be diligent, and don't waste the thought she spent on you."

When the pot-boy brought Denis his supper of boiled beef and greens, a cut of bread and a mug of ale, he put the book back in his pocket. And while he ate, his thoughts went back to his grandfather. A fixed, hard old man; one who, nearing the end of his life, felt fear for the first time. Owen had seldom spoken of him, and when he did, it was with the careful words of one whose desire it was not to say all that was in his mind. The two had never agreed; even as a lad, Owen had rebelled at the constant menace of his father's tongue and hand. As a young man he'd grown sullen and silent.

The two had gone on together, however, though there was little passed between them. A year or so later Owen had married Ann Craufurd, a ship captain's daughter. Time passed, and Denis was born. It was possibly two years after this, at the end of a hard winter's day on the road, while the horses stood stripped of their harness, their sweating hides smoking in the frosty air, that a thing happened. It may have been a look, it may have been a spoken word—Owen never knew. But there was one flaming outburst; and then, taking his wife and child, he'd gone away—for good and all. Simon never saw him again.

As Denis sat at the tavern table, he pondered the things he'd been told in years past; and the words of his grandfather, heard that afternoon, followed each other through his head. He'd never desired to come to this place where



his father had fared so poorly. Since early boyhood, life had been calling him in another direction, to the West; over the mountains to the beginnings of the great waters. The Ohio had always tempted him with its growing traffic: flatboats, keel-boats, the grumpy little steamers. Down the river to Cairo, where its flood was swallowed by the greater Mississippi; then on to St. Louis, to see the thick waters of the Missouri also taken over by the giant. And he'd think of the grand sight of the three, now made one, rolling on for maybe a thousand miles to the shining market of New Orleans.

Owen had often talked to him of the growing possibilities of trade in the new country. Of what merchants and wagoners might do: the buying of more and more merchandise in the East, and the hauling of it across the hills where it could be bartered for the produce of the West. And from time to time the great accumulations could be put aboard rafts made of cut forest trees and turned into bright minted money at the end of the journey.

The way across the mountains was a rough one, Owen would tell him, but it would improve. And no matter if this were not soon, the big road horses, the splendid Conestoga wagons, which were like ships mounted upon wheels, would make their way. Goods of all sorts were to be had in Philadelphia. Then, with luck, three weeks between the Delaware and the Ohio. . . . Owen's eyes would glow as he'd talk. This hauling would be needed, profitable work. And it was not only the teams that were to be taken into account. There were the rafts; there were the keel-boats. Above all, there were the steamers! Owen's thought was that the future belonged to that type of craft. A man with a dozen sturdily engined boats would be king of the Western rivers.

But Owen died when Denis was about eighteen. He left a small amount of money, six well-conditioned wagons, and two score span of strong horses. He had meant these things to be a beginning; but fate had said he was not to do any of the things that had so filled his mind. But he left his dream behind him. For afterward, as Denis loaded the road ships, as he trudged beside them along the turnpike, or as he rode upon the wheel horse, or upon the lazy-board, with the team breasting the rising ground, one thought was always in his mind. Transportation! The carrying of needful things from places where there were plenty, to places where they were scarce. He thought of a whole life of service—and of satisfaction.

THREE groups of wagoners were gathered in the wide bar of the Horse and Bridle, drinking whisky and talking loudly. Denis noticed that these groups kept increasing as he sat at the table; also, at those moments when his attention left his own affairs, he saw many eyes turned in his direction, and realized that under the loud talk there was a good deal that was lower-pitched and seemed, oddly enough, to concern him. However, he was a stranger in the town, and he took that to be the answer.

A short man, in half-boots, who stepped briskly on a pair of crooked legs, came into the bar; he ordered ale and some ship's biscuit. He had an air of good cheer and looked about him, his tall beaver hat somewhat upon the

side of his head, and his hands under the long tails of his coat. By and by his attention became fixed upon Denis; and when the ale and biscuit were placed before him on the bar, he paid for them, took them to the table where the young man sat, and established himself near to Denis.

"A very nice stretch of weather we're having," he said.

"Quite," said Denis briefly, and glancing at him.

"Weather like this makes travel on the road less of a hardship," said the man in the beaver hat; "and from the look of your horse and yourself when you got here, you must have come a long distance."

Denis again looked at the man; and this time he gave more time to it. But he said nothing.

"After a fashion," said the stranger, "I'm connected with the turnpike. A horse surgeon by profession—a handy trade, and useful to the owners of teams working the road. Many a hurt horse is saved by a little learning. My name's Kipper," he told Denis.

The young man nodded, but continued to be silent. He finished his boiled beef, swirled the ale around in the pot to freshen it, and drank it off.

"Some hours ago," said the horse surgeon, "I happened to be within earshot during a passage of words between yourself and Mule Shapely. And," he said, regarding Denis with attention, "a word about that ruffian just now may be useful. He is dangerous. He's broken the bones of more than one excellent man."

"He had a wicked look," said Denis. "But that may not mean much."

The short man put his tall hat back on his head somewhat; he pushed back from the table so that he might cross one leg over the other.

"Shapely is a person to be avoided," he cautioned Denis. "I hope you'll not think me too forward; but when I saw you coming into this tavern awhile ago, I wondered if you were using good judgment."

Denis smiled. "Maybe not," he said. "I sometimes don't."

"I happen to know that word was sent the Mule as soon as you appeared."

Denis lifted his brows. "No!" he said.

"You were hardly inside the door," said the horse surgeon, "when he was outside it. And he's there still."

The young man smiled; however, at the same time, his lower jaw hardened; he had a clear impression of himself rolling in the dust some hours before, trying to avoid the brutal kicks of this same ruffian. And there was a sudden lighting of his eyes, now that it seemed the matter was not done with.

Kipper was measuring him observantly, seeming to be searching for something in Denis' face and manner; and a close student of such things would have noted that he was not displeased with what he found. But he said:

"You'd have done better for yourself if you'd gone to the President Monroe. You are a traveler going about your own business; they'd have taken you in, and you'd not been in any danger."

"Danger?" said Denis quietly. "Am I in danger?"

"You are, without a doubt; perhaps not at this moment," added Kipper, watching him closely, "but once you put your foot outside, you will—"



But a gesture from Denis stopped him.

"Up to now I've always contrived to take care of myself," said the young man.

But the horse surgeon persisted.

"In the scuffle this afternoon," he stated, "you showed a good deal of adroitness; but at the same time, if you'll let me say so, you were very fortunate."

Denis smiled. "Who can tell?" he said. "Maybe at another time I might be as much so."

"This man's career on the road has been one long brawl," said Kipper. "And"—stressing this information carefully—"he is, after a way of speaking, invincible. Seamen have come ashore from the ships in the bay; noted bullies from outlying places have traveled here to encounter him. But he is still the gamecock of all the broad way between the two cities."

"I'm beginning to be interested," said Denis. "Somehow I feel I'd like to see this champion once more."

"He's standing in the shadow, just outside the door," said the horse surgeon, leaning toward Denis, his hand at one side of his mouth, guardedly. "His thought is that you'll not notice him, and that he'll be able to take you unexpectedly. It's a way he has."

"A filthy way, too!" said Denis.

He pushed aside the ale mug and the plate, and stood up leisurely, brushing away the crumbs. As he pulled in his belt, every eye in the place was upon him. The loud talk died down; but the whispering, so to call it, went on.

"If he's there, I'll very likely see him on my way out," he told Kipper. He smiled in a tight-lipped way, and anyone who had known Simon Abernathy in his younger days would have wondered at the resemblance between them at that moment.

"If," said Kipper, "it is your intention to go out for a breath of air merely, you could use this other door,"—pointing to one at the side. "In that way, you'd avoid him: which"—his eyes filled with speculation—"might be just as well."

Denis buttoned up his jacket, and pulled his hat well down on his head; he did not so much as glance at the side door, but stepped past it in an unhurried way. The horse surgeon paced at his heels, his beaver hat at an aggressive angle, and his hands under his coat tails.

There were several windows overlooking the road; Denis paused at one of these.

"He's there," he said to Kipper, "just as you said."

"With his eyes on the door, waiting for you to step your foot over the threshold."

"You say, in his quarrels with people, it's his habit to take them by surprise?"

"He has a pride in it," said Kipper. "He thinks of it as tactics."

Denis seemed to gather himself together a good deal as an animal does before it leaps; then he suddenly threw open the door, was outside in an instant, and upon the waiting man. Once, twice, thrice, he struck him. The Mule pitched forward upon his face. Grim and ruthies, Denis dragged him to his feet; again he struck him, and again. And once more the man fell. Those who had been in the bar of the Horse and Bridle came pouring out: doz-

ens of wagoners, who had been loitering about, gathered quickly into a tightening knot. There were a score of voices lifted in astonished outcries. All was amazement and clamor. And now, above the confusion and the talk, a single voice lifted: a blasting voice, full of arrogance:

"A vile, cowardly thing to do! The man who'd do a thing like that, who'd take such a filthy advantage of an unsuspecting person, should be taken and flogged."

Denis Abernathy turned swiftly to look at the person who had put his thoughts so definitely on record. It was the young man he'd seen that afternoon at the counting-house of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy, striding up and down, slashing with a whip at his boots. Denis, with tightened jaw, had taken a step in his direction; but he felt a grip upon his arm, and Kipper said to him in a low voice:

"Be advised! Have no dealings of any kind with this man. Above all, not at this time. It is Louis Descoings; you were warned about him once before this afternoon."

CHAPTER FOUR

YOUNG Abernathy had left word, back in the mountains, to send his chest of belongings by wagon; and he mentioned it to the landlord of the Horse and Bridle next morning and asked him to send it on to the President Monroe Tavern if it arrived. Then he crossed the bay to New York in a bustling little steamboat, made his way, under directions, up Broadway to Rector, and then into Wall. Reaching South Street, he searched for and found Coffee House Slip, and not many minutes later was at the door of Counselor Thistlewater.

The offices were over the warehouse of a merchant who dealt in salt and dried fish; one ascended a narrow stair and entered at a door upon which was painted the occupant's name. There was a sort of waiting-room, lined with dusty lawbooks and furnished with heavy chairs and a huge sofa; small-paned windows looked out upon the tumult of South Street, its docks filled with shipping, its none too wide way thronged with carts and drays.

There was a young man sitting at one of the windows, reading a newspaper. Quite a stout, elegant person in a snowy white stock, a skirted blue coat having metal buttons, fawn-colored pantaloons with their bottoms strapped under polished boots. He had a round, cheery, good-humored face, and lounged over the news with an air of much contentment. Denis Abernathy had been in the room for some moments before the elegant young man was aware of him. And then he arose instantly.

"Well, now," he said, "this is a fortunate meeting. I've thought of you a number of times and hoped I'd see you somewhere."

He held out his hand. Denis took it, a puzzled look on his face. Seeing this, the young man said:

"But I see you don't recall me. I was the driver of that most unmanageable pair of horses at Amboy yesterday. You did me a service and got into trouble for it. I want to thank you for the first, and express my concern for the second."

Denis now remembered him, and smiled.

"I'm glad if I was of any help," he said. "And brawls like that one are common enough on the big roads these days."

"But that fellow had you on the ground, trying to stamp upon you," protested the stranger. "And I was so taken up with those dolts of horses I couldn't let go the reins."

"I came out of it without any damage," said Denis.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that; and as I've just said, I'm most pleased to see you again."

THEY sat down, and the well-gotten-up young man began to talk. He was voluble, seeming one of those who, once having a start, kept at it with the utmost industry. His name was Gerard Monselet, and he was from New Orleans. The Monselets had been in that city, Denis learned, from almost the beginning. He said he painted indifferent pictures, and played the violin rather well. His experience with horses, he carefully explained, was limited. He had never done anything that was profitable; fortunately he had a little money and lived not too expensively.

It proved to be his idea that persons of limited means should always be careful. Lois' people, for example, were the reverse. Lois was his cousin. It was she who'd been in the carriage with him the day before.

"Oh, yes," Denis said, his attention immediately caught. "She has dark eyes."

Young Monselet laughed.

"So she has. People always notice them. And she's very beautiful in other ways. Lois," said the young Creole, "also has a mind. With that, she has a disposition. When she chooses, she can be somewhat upsetting. I am one of those who think beautiful women should never have strong characters. But Lois has one; as a matter of fact, she has the only one in the family. It's possibly derived from her mother's people. The Moreaus, as a group, are gentle."

"Moreau!" Denis Abernathy sounded the name with a lift to his voice.

"Oh, yes, of course; belonging hereabouts, you'd know that name. As I suppose you've guessed, she's one of the Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy, Moreaus." He pointed to a door on the other side of the room. "At this moment she's inside there, consulting with Thistlewate."

Denis looked at the door with much interest.

"I'd no idea any of the Moreaus were in this section," he said.

"Lois, like myself, is only a visitor. We arrived in this section only yesterday; and our presence is entirely due to the two things I mentioned a few moments ago: her mind and her disposition. Thinking a good deal about things has caused her to become dissatisfied. Between us, and not intending it to go any farther," he said trustfully, "the New Orleans end of the business is none too prosperous."

"I've heard that," said Denis.

Young Monselet looked surprised.

"Of course, such things finally become known," he said.

"Naturally enough, I suppose. Lois began to know about them only a month or so ago, and she at once told the family that their affairs needed a good looking into. And as no one else seemed inclined to do anything, she made up her mind she'd do it herself. So she's come North, and I've come with her."

Denis stretched out his feet and looked at the toes of his boots. A girl—especially a beautiful, dark-eyed one like this—coming so long a distance to match herself against a clever group of rascals such as his grandfather made the Descoings out to be!

"And she's now consulting Counselor Thistlewate?"

The Creole nodded.

"Yes; and, I'd venture, giving him a most interesting half-hour. She is very persistent when she thinks her rights are involved."

Denis considered all this. He thought of old Simon, and the attempts made upon his life—and because he too had

been persistent when he'd made up his mind his rights were involved. Denis was frowning and liking the thing less with each passing second, when there came a drawing-back of chairs on the other side of the door to Thistlewate's consulting-room; then the door was opened and a round-bodied old gentleman with a red face and a shock of up-standing white hair appeared, and after him came the lovely Lois Moreau, dressed charmingly, and with her dark head held quite high.

"All that can be done, I will assuredly do," the round-bodied old gentleman was saying. "But it will take some time. What I suggest is that you go back by the next vessel to New Orleans; there you can wait comfortably for my report."

"When shall I have that?" asked the girl. "How long shall I have to wait?"

The Counselor shook his white head.

"That I couldn't say. These matters are sometimes very elusive. They are difficult to put a finger upon. It may be weeks," thoughtfully. "It may, on the other hand, be months."

"Months!"

"It would not surprise me at all," said the wise Mr. Thistlewate, "if it occupied a year. Or even two."

The girl's beautiful head was held still higher as she looked at him; and her dark eyes were flashing.

"I shall remain in Amboy," she said. "It is impossible that a matter like this should take so much time. I shall remain," she said, "and see that it is promptly attended to."

The red face of the Counselor widened in a smile.

"Very good," he said. "Of course, that is your privilege. But as I said to you a few moments ago, I have already spent some time searching into this affair. Earnestly and industriously, mind you. And with little satisfaction. Indeed, I might say, with no satisfaction at all. Things do not turn out their facts at the snapping of one's fingers, Miss Moreau. And that can be especially said of things like this. Whatever interests tie them up—" But he stopped there, his eyes for the first time upon Denis. "But," he resumed, "we will not discuss that now. Take my advice and get the next ship to New Orleans. There are quite some comfortable ones sailing from here. At home, things will be quieter."

"At home," said the girl, "things will not be quieter. They ceased being quiet some time ago. And if I return without a clear solution of what is going on here, they will become even less so."

"In a few days," said Counselor Thistlewate, his eyes still questioningly upon Denis, "I'll have made a new beginning. After that, if you are still in the city, I shall communicate with you."

"I shall be here," the girl said, and she said it quite firmly. The constant gaze of the Counselor in the direction of Denis caused her eyes, also, to turn toward him. But at once they were averted. There was a quick look of resentful contempt in her face. "Gerard," she said to young Monselet, "we are going."

Thistlewate opened the door leading to the stairway, and she passed through it swiftly. Monselet arose, shook hands with Denis and said:

"I'd hoped, at least, to have time to tell her who you are. But when she's like this, there's no way of being sure of her. It's her strong character," he said regretfully. "And that, as I remarked to you a few moments ago, is a thing no beautiful woman should have."

HE left, and Thistlewate closed the door. The old attorney stood with his back to it and put a huge pair of silver-rimmed glasses astride his nose. After a close examination of Denis, he said:

"You'd be Abernathy's grandson, I think."

"Yes," said Denis.

"I had word from him last night. Saying you'd likely be here today. Come on into the consulting-room."



Denis seemed to gather himself together . . . then he suddenly was outside and upon the waiting man.

The inner room of Counselor Thistlewate was also dusty and lined with books, much like the outer one. There were huddles of papers on hooks, and partly open drawers were filled with them. There were maps upon the walls, and pictures of ships.

"You are my grandfather's attorney, I understand," said the young man.

"His personal adviser in all matters that touch upon the law," said Thistlewate. "There was a time, some years ago, when the firm of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy employed me. But matters changed: the Descoings, father and son, refused to tolerate me any longer." He laughed cheerily and waved his hand toward a chair. "Sit down," he said. He seated himself at a huge black writing-table and faced Denis with stout confidence. "Simon wrote you a letter," he said. "After the thought came into his mind, he hesitated; but when he mentioned it to me, I told him to do it at once and send it off by the first wagon."

SMILING, Denis nodded. "I thank you for that," he said. "There is nothing like the firm bonds of kinship in a time of trouble."

"I knew the moment I saw you, that you were Owen's son," said the Counselor. "I remember him well, and I hoped you'd be like him. That was hoping for a good deal, for Owen was of a kind we seldom see."

"Again I thank you," said Denis.

"As I've said, I had word from your grandfather last night," said the Counselor. "He said you were in Amboy, and that he'd spoken with you. That he'd mentioned some things to you, and desired me to tell you what I know. He's very old now," said the stout Counselor, shaking his head. "He's only the remains of what he once was; his nerves are gone; dread seems to have him by the throat. Early in life he was a man with grand thews and a hard mind; he'd then have walked into things, without a moment's thought, that he'd now hardly dare think of."

"There were some strange things in his talk!"

"I know what you mean," said Counselor Thistlewate. "It is the kind of thing one finds hard to believe. Murder!" The broad face was suddenly tight, the eyes startled. "Three times attempted. By whom? And why?"

"He seemed to have some thoughts upon both these points," said Denis.

"He has. And I have followed him along the direction his mind has taken. But," said the Counselor, "not all the way—I find it hard to believe Henri Descoings, treacherous as I know him to be, would turn his hand to murder."

Denis said nothing to this, and there was a silence for a few moments. Counselor Thistlewate then continued:

"Your grandfather's part in the company's business was land transportation. I suppose you know that he began many years ago with some pack-horses; the business in time grew to such a size that he carried most of the State's merchandise. Owen," said the Counselor, "did a good deal of the building of this when he put his hand to the system, though that was a thing his father gave him no credit for. Simon was that kind of man."

"The Descoings established themselves in New York about that time. In this street. They had a dozen sound ships, French built; they had a large remnant of the trade they'd carried on at L'Orient, and they began their business here. Very cleverly! They were people accustomed to close practice; they kept a tight hold on their own and took what they could wring from others. They knew the handlers of raw materials; they knew the markets where such things were needed. They employed people in their ships who got from them all the speed they had to give; for speed, as the Descoings knew, was a very necessary thing. They extended their trade to the south by taking in the Moreaus. They saw the need of a transportation system into the back country, and liked the driving enterprise of Simon Abernathy. In a little while they had him with them as a partner in their business."

Thistlewate had been a pushing attorney in those days, it developed; he'd had a good knowledge of marine affairs, and the Descoings took him up. He liked adventure, and the business of these shipowners teemed with that. Never a vessel of their entered the home port without some commercial victory, a sharp blow struck somewhere, a rival house baffled in a brisk matching of wits. It was a great satisfaction to him to be connected with such a house.

"But," the old attorney told Denis, "as I continued with it, I began to come upon things I did not like. The elder Descoings had died. He'd been a big-nosed man who knew even the smallest details of his business. It was his habit to sit for hours over his letters, the reports of his captains, or the lists from the exchange, rubbing his hands and thinking. Every move he made was skillfully calculated; he lighted all the ways to profit, carefully. And his mistakes were few. When, after his death, his son Henri came to the top, things began to happen. There were no more brilliant adventures: but there was a deal more craft. Sooth, mind you—admirably done, delicately touched. But each touch, for all that, left a dirty mark."

"I was with them for some years after this; but finally I grew tired of appearing in court in defense of matters I know to be fraudulent. I began to inquire closely into things; I insisted upon complete histories; I demanded documents and records. Henri didn't like that. When he wanted of an attorney was legal victories built upon evidence supplied him. So, little by little," said Counselor Thistlewate cheerfully, "pressure was put upon me, and I gave up their work."

"But your grandfather kept with me as a client. He'd helped and encouraged me in my explorations into the firm's way of business, and appealed to me to go on with it as best I could. Not," said the Counselor candidly, "that he was opposed to the shadowy practices of the Descoings in a general way. For your grandfather has always been willing to take his profits and make no faces about them. But he himself was being pinched, and did not like it. Something had been going on that he didn't understand, something that was making him poorer and of less importance; he was fighting bitterly to find the reason for it, and desired my help in the searching."

"From what he told me, little was found," said Denis.

"I am accustomed to trickery of all sorts," said the Counselor, "and know that light is bound, at some time or other, to fall upon and expose its workings. But so far, there has been no ray upon the Abernathy situation. It is deeper and darker today than it was on the one when he came to me first and put what he knew of it before me."

"If he is being wrongfully deprived of his earnings in the company, can this not be taken into court?" asked Denis.

"When an attorney goes into court, he should at least carry with him the thing upon which his case rests. But this matter of your grandfather's, as I've just said, is so doubtful, so dark and obscure, that a holy angel would be bothered by it. If all the books and papers and letters of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy were thrown before the authorities of a court, without reservation, I feel sure nothing would come of it."

"I was told yesterday you had some information to give me," said Denis.

"That is an illusion of Simon's that he refuses to give up," said the Counselor. "I actually know nothing. I merely suspect. The only person who has been in a position to say a positive word is your grandfather himself; but he's now so shaken and vague that his memory of things would never carry conviction."

"You feel sure that he has records that might show something?"

"If there are, I couldn't give a name to them. Your grandfather always trusted himself more than anyone else."

"It seems odd," said Denis, "that a train of rascality could be laid across a series of years and no one be able to trace it." Thistlewate nodded, and pursed up his lips; he gave

every indication that he thought so too. "Since coming to Amboy," added the young man, after a silence, "I have seen Henri Descoings' son."

The good-humored face of the old attorney darkened.

"A damned hectoring horse-headed blackguard!" he said, stormily. "Enough has happened in the business as it is, but let that young man come into control of it, and God only knows what more there will be."

"I saw him several times yesterday."

"Quite likely. And more than likely he and his father knew you had been called East; he may have been waiting for you."

"That is possible," said Denis.

"Take care he does you no injury. In his way, he's a consummate ruffian, holding most things, including the law, in contempt."

"Do you know a man named Kipper?" Denis asked.

"A horse surgeon?"

"He said he was that."

"I know," said old Thistlewate, "that of late years he is very much in your grandfather's confidence. A shrewd and rather engaging person, I think."

"Is he to be trusted?"

"That," said the attorney, "is a matter I could not advise you upon. Lacking any precise knowledge of him, I'd suggest caution in any dealings you may have with him."

They talked for some time longer, and then Denis said:

"It's your opinion, then, that the affairs of my grandfather offer nothing just now that might be taken hold of?"

"Quite likely you shall be seeing a good deal of Simon while you are in this section," said the Counselor. "Question him about what documents he has which might be of some use to you. I say *you*, because I feel sure he is not long for this life."

By and by Denis arose and shook hands with the old lawyer.

"I shall see you again in a few days," he said. "By that time I may have learned something."

"Don't fail to let me hear of anything you come upon that has interest. I'm anxious," said the stout Counselor.

CHAPTER FIVE

DENIS ABERNATHY recrossed on the fussy little steamer to Perth Amboy. The river and bay were full of sail, but the sooty arrogance of steam was showing itself even in that early day. The islands were dull-looking in the late winter night; and New York, as he left it, seemed sunken and shabby in the rising water.

Denis stood with his back to the rail in the forward part of the boat; amidship there was a thickening of passengers, and by and by, as he thought over the things old Thistlewate had said to him, he caught sight of a tall and rather rusty beaver hat bobbing up and down in the throng. Somehow this held his attention; then moving up and down and to and fro in the crowd he saw a pair of half-boots which also seemed familiar. Accompanying the half-boots in their restless pacing was a pair of soft leather ones, shining, and with the ends of a pair of pantaloons strapped down under the insteps.

Then, as the crowd began to shift, Denis had a clearer view. Under the beaver hat strode the horse surgeon Kipper, his hands beneath his coat tails, his head cocked to one side. With him was a large, plump man who had a beaming, kindly face, and who gestured with placid hands while he talked. Kipper was listening to what was said; now and then he nodded as though in agreement. There was a close confidential air about the two that made Denis observe them carefully; he especially noted the large, smooth-looking man, for he seemed a person who might have meaning attached to him.

When the boat drew into its dock and tied fast, Denis went ashore; he passed the two men, who were standing at



"I shall remain in Amboy," Lois said.

a little distance, and as he did so he saw, out of the tail of his eye, that they drew suddenly together. He was sure that, as his back was turned, Kipper was pointing him out.

The young man stowed this little episode away in his memory as he made his way along the planked walk in the direction of the President Monroe Tavern. Here he inquired about his baggage. Yes, it had arrived; also, the landlady told him, she'd ordered it taken to a large comfortable room on the quiet side of the house. She also said she'd seen to it that there was a fire lighted in the grate, and at that moment knew there was a fine cheery bed of coals there awaiting his enjoyment.

Denis thanked her for her foresight; a porter showed him to the room, which he found was quite up to the landlady's description of it.

"Hot water," he said to the porter. "A good deal of it."

"Shall you have the tub, sir?" asked the man.

"Have you one?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the porter. "Mrs. Culley thinks no really respectable tavern should be without one."

So the tub, round and rather small, was brought in; also the hot water and soap and towels. Denis felt greatly refreshed after his bath; and he got out his shaving tackle and shaved away the three-days' beard which he'd been wearing. The porter, who came in to remove the tub and other things, said to him:

"Might I ask, sir, if you are of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy?"

"I'm not," said Denis, as he carefully guided the keen blade around the angle of his jaw.

"The landlady was wondering. She says Mr. Descoings was inquiring if you were here."

Denis took the razor away and turned to look at the man.

"Which of the Mr. Descoings?" he asked.

"I think the old one, sir. Mrs. Culley says he came quite early. But she hadn't had notice of you at that time, and he was told you weren't here."

Denis considered this after the man had gone away. The Descoings knew of his presence in the town; they'd probably, as lawyer Thistlewate had suggested, known of his coming in advance. They may, indeed, have been awaiting him. And Denis thought of old Simon, and the attempts upon his life. While he was so meditating, there came a knock upon his door.

"Come in," he said, thinking it was the porter once more. But it was Kipper, who came striding in, and sat down.

"I felt you'd be here," the man said, one crooked leg crossed over the other. "And I took the liberty of asking Mrs. Culley. Mrs. Culley is proud of you; I take it that she thinks having an Abernathy as a guest is no mean thing."

Denis looked at Kipper narrowly. The young man was disposed to like him; but somehow he couldn't get his mind accustomed to him.

"Many of the people of Amboy have always looked up to Simon Abernathy," said Kipper. "I'll be frank, and say a good many others don't like him. But in spite of that, they hold him as one of their outstanding citizens."

Kipper said he, for one, had always got on with Simon. He leaned back in his chair, and told how he'd first met him. It was in late spring—a warm evening when the air was heavy with moisture, an evening when the thews of man and beast seem to loosen and grow soft.

"There is, as you probably know, no more dangerous time on the road than the end of such a day," said Kipper. "The horses are taken by surprise; they haven't the resistance they've built up in the full heat of summer. Their marrow is too thin and their blood too thick; they sag and lose their spirit."

On this particular evening, or it may have been later than evening, for darkness had already settled down, Kipper was driving along the Burlington Road in his cart, drawn by two tall Spanish mules. And he came upon a six-horse team with the wheel horses down in the dust, and old Simon Abernathy, a lantern in his hand, cursing them in very desperation.

"How long ago was that?" asked Denis.

"Something less than ten years. In spite of the fact that he was of the widely known firm of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy, he still was seen on the road with a wagon now and then. It was a way he had of keeping a finger upon the pulse of his business; beside that, he was proud. He hated to admit he was old and less able than he had been."

BUT that had been one of his last ventures. Also it had been the beginning of his acquaintance with Kipper.

"One of the horses had strained the sinews of its back," said the horse surgeon. "But I got it upon its feet, and cobbled it up so that the wagon was able to make the next stand, where another animal was ready by next morning. Your grandfather always liked a man who knew his trade," said Kipper. "And he's used my talents ever since."

"From what you said last night, he's mentioned me to you," said Denis.

"Yes; that was some time ago. Perhaps a month. He was expecting you; and he asked me to watch and give you help if you needed it. Last evening I saw him at Dacre's to tell him you'd reached here. But he'd already seen you. It was then he told me he'd warned you against all dealings, conversations or transactions of whatsoever kind with Louis Descoings."

"Is it that he holds Louis in special detestation, or that he thinks him a worse rascal than his father?"

Kipper grinned at this; he coddled one knee and looked at Denis with interest.

"The father is not active these days; not in the same way the son is, at any rate. When I saw Louis in consultation with Mule Shapely sometime after your first encounter with him yesterday, I thought it meant something. And I kept an eye on the Mule afterwards."

Denis finished shaving. He put on a white linen shirt and stock. The pantaloons and boots that he drew on as

he sat on the edge of the bed were well-fitting and smart-looking, as was the double-breasted, skirted coat of dark-green cloth. He brushed his hair until it lay thick and luxuriant back from his brow. And Kipper, as he looked at the long length of him, at the wide shoulders and free-swinging movements, nodded his head; also he stroked his chin and narrowed his eyes. He seemed to see something he hadn't expected.

"I'd heard of you sometime back," he said. "You were working some teams in the Western mountains, I think."

"Yes," said Denis.

"When your grandfather got to thinking he should write to you, I told him that. It gave him some idea how to reach you."

"I'd been on the road for two or three years," said Denis. "Before that, I'd been in the wagon-shop."

Kipper nodded toward a small heap of books which had been taken from the still open chest.

"And you've given some time to learning, I think."

"Not as much as I'd have liked."

"The old man hasn't much," said Kipper, "but I think he likes it in others. Especially I think he'll like it in you. I draw from his talk that he expects you to step into his place when he passes on."

"That," said Denis, "must be a new idea. According to his own saying, he never gave thought to me one way or the other."

"Lately," said Kipper, "it's been different. Every time I've talked with him, he's mentioned you. From being nothing at all in his life, you have come to be everything." And the man went on with lowered voice: "But how else could it be? An old man, with everything he's worked so hard for being taken from him. With his life put in danger. He'd naturally think of his son; and his son being no more, you'd be the next in his mind."

"My father once said to me that he was that kind of man," Denis said, rather bitterly. "With not much thought for anyone unless he needed them."

Kipper grinned at this; he took out a great blue handkerchief, and blew his nose.

"We can never change people," he said. "No matter what's said to them or of them, they go on being what they were meant to be at first. For myself, I've given Simon Abernathy good service—in more ways than one. He's paid me, but that's all. One night, by the merest chance, I saved his life. He didn't so much as thank me for it."

Denis looked at Kipper for a moment in silence.

"That may have been the night the man tried to strangle him as he stepped into the hall of his own house."

"He's mentioned it to you, then? But I dare say, he didn't tell you the name of the man who went to his help."

"No," said Denis.

Kipper shook his head, humorously.

"He wouldn't," he told Denis. "So you know an important thing about him at the beginning. That night," Kipper said, his eyes fixed upon the young man, "I was passing down a street at a late hour; I'd been called to bleed a horse which was in severe convulsions. There was an open door; my attention was called to it by a struggle going on in the passage. A voice called for help. I carry a holster pistol when I'm abroad at night; I drew this and stepped into the place to see what service I could give. But the assailant was gone. I followed him through the house, but gave him up when he took to the roof-tops."

"Have you ever had any thoughts about who the person or persons might be who made these attempts?"

Kipper frowned, and shook his head.

"Nothing to talk about; and what I've had, your grandfather is, I think, responsible for. There are people he hates. So when things began to happen, I guess he just naturally thought of them."

"He's now living in the house of a man named Dacre: a man employed by the firm. Do you think he's safer there than he was in his own place?"

"Since he's been at Dacre's, nothing has happened," said Kipper.

Denis was far from being satisfied with these replies; the man seemed evasive. However, when Kipper rose to go, he said: "You'll be seeing the old man soon, I take it?"

"Perhaps tonight. But surely tomorrow."

Kipper stood silent for a space; he seemed to be studying the young man.

"He'll be wanting you to stay on here," he said, finally. "He's that kind. He'll never give anything up; he'll want you to do what he's not been able to do."

Denis nodded, but was silent.

"That," said Kipper, "will be dangerous. It has almost cost him his life several times, as you've been shown. And he still may pay that price before the thing is done. And you may also pay it if you stay here."

Again Denis nodded; and he was still silent.

"My advice," said Kipper, "is to go away. And take the old man with you. There is nothing either of you can do."

CHAPTER SIX

SOMETIME after Kipper left, Denis Abernathy descended to the coffee-room. Mrs. Culley, seeing him enter the room, came forward in quite a flutter. She'd been quite pleased to have an Abernathy as a guest at her house, to begin with; but now that she saw him so spruce and so stalwart, so cleanly done over and handsome, she was all smiles and gratification.

"Where will you sit, Mr. Abernathy?" she asked.

"Anywhere you please," he said, not caring for the eyes that were fixed upon him from various parts of the room.

"Here is a nice round table where you'll not be disturbed," she said, and led him to it. He sat down at the table, which was dressed out in a snowy white linen cloth. "I shall have you attended to at once. There is a fine round of beef, if you care for that. Or a loin of venison. Also we can broil you a grouse; there were some came in today which are delicate and plump. And there is a good leek soup which you'll be sure to relish; and hot bread with fresh butter."

She mentioned other things; Denis selected what he wanted, and she bustled off to the kitchen, quite stirred. The young man sat back in his chair, his eyes going about the room. Almost directly opposite him was a doorway; the door opened into a smaller room with a table in its center. And at this sat none other than Gerard Monselet, and opposite him the beautiful Lois Moreau. The young lady seemed agitated; she spoke rapidly and heatedly. Young Monselet gestured, much like a discomfited magician trying to calm a storm. He appealed, he looked reproachful, he denied. But finally he arose from the table, came directly to the one at which Denis sat, and took a chair opposite him.

"Good evening," he said.

"Good evening," said Denis.

"I'm in the midst of quite a gale," said the young Creole. "You see, Lois has heard you are an Abernathy. She was surprised; and I was too, we having had no idea who you were. The difference between us is that I was glad to hear it. But she resents it quite a good deal. And she has requested me to speak to you."

Denis looked interested. "Well," he said, "I see no difficulty in that."

"There is, however," said Monselet. "As I told you this morning, no one is able to do much with Lois when she's made up her mind."

"I'm wondering," said Denis, "if her eyes are as beautiful in her quieter moments as they are when she's angry."

"I know what you mean," said Monselet. "Each time you've seen her, she's been in a temper. But I assure you she is sometimes very gentle and sweet-mannered. However, I'll admit she's not been that way often, of late."

"Don't forget, she's come North on disturbing business," Denis said.

"She has; but it's disturbing her more than it should." The young Creole was silent for a few moments; then he said: "After leaving Thistlewate this morning, I advised her to rest. She'd heard very little there that was satisfactory, and was quite unsettled. But she refused my suggestion. She had not come up into what she called 'this barbarous part of the country' for rest. She'd come for information. She'd come for an explanation of the sad condition of her father's affairs. That alone would give her rest. And when we reached Perth Amboy once more, she had decided to go to the counting-house of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy, and there demand a full statement of all these proceedings which were impoverishing her family."

"I see," said Denis. "But a girl—especially a girl with no experience—"

"I told her that," interrupted young Monselet. "I warned her that these people spoke a language she'd not understand. With that, she was angry! She called me a coward! She said I was afraid to face actual difficulties. And that I needn't go. She'd go alone. She'd speak plainly, and demand plain answers."

"But you went?" said Denis.

"She'd not permit it. You don't know Lois," said the Southerner, "or you wouldn't think it strange that I did as I was ordered. I came here to the inn; she went on to the firm's place of business."

"Has she told you what was said?"

"I have heard nothing else since she returned. She has talked steadily. Her indignation is unbounded. She has walked the floor."

"Maybe," said Denis, "it wouldn't be thought a breach of confidence if you told me—"

But Monselet stopped him.

"She wants to tell you," he said. "That has been the contention between us ever since you came into the room. She insisted that I bring you to our table for a full and complete discussion of what has happened in the near past and what is to happen in the future."

"Why, I think we might do that," said Denis.

"It will not be easy. She does not favor you, personally; also, she detests your name. And you'd have to add to those things the fact that she has it fixed in her mind that you are responsible for a good deal of what has happened."

Denis glanced at the girl who sat waiting in the inner room. In spite of the impetuosity she was being charged with, he saw delicacy and charm; and the idea of taking a buffeting from her amused him.

"I still think I might venture," he said to Monselet.

They arose and went into the side room.

"Denis Abernathy," said Monselet to the girl. "Lois Moreau," he said to Denis.

Denis bowed; the girl said to him: "Will you sit down, please?" He did so, and she continued: "Gerard has told me that you know why I have come North."

"I believe," he said soberly, "that it is for the same reason I have come East."

She frowned, and regarded him with plain distrust.

"I'm afraid I do not understand that," she said.

"From what Mr. Monselet has told me, you are here to learn why certain things are occurring in the business affairs of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy. Or to be quite exact, why the value is, little by little, seeping out of the holdings of the southern branch of the company." He paused for a moment. "I've been called East," he said, "for a reason not only exactly like that, but having certain shocking attachments that are a great deal worse."

She listened coldly to this, and then said:

"When I arrived here yesterday, I did not know what to expect. I thought of mismanagement; I thought of neglect in the accounts, of lack of proper oversight. It had occurred to me that the active management of the business might be in the hands of men who were too old to manage

it properly. But I never once thought of deliberate roguery."

Denis lifted his brows. "I've been told you paid a visit to the firm's offices this morning," he said.

"I suppose Gerard told you that," she said. She looked at young Monselet resentfully. "He has the gift of words, and it's a gift he is constantly exercising."

"I felt it was necessary to make Mr. Abernathy acquainted with certain things," said young Monselet, with a show of good humor. "Also," he said, "I told him a few other things—to ready him for what was ahead of him."

There was a stain in the girl's cheeks; her firm little chin was lifted in disdain. She turned once more to Denis.

"The dealings of the Moreaus have always been with the Descoings," she said. "The Abernathys have been strangers to us. I doubt," she said, "if any of my people ever saw Simon Abernathy until a half dozen or so years ago, when he came to New Orleans and began asking questions."

SHE'D seen him: a gaunt, big-boned old man who looked worn and ill—but his jaws were like a trap, and his eyes like flint. He asked to see the books, and she was told he studied them for days. He had no admiration for the way the Moreaus conducted their affairs; he frowned at the idea of slaves as office men, as crews for the ships, as supercargoes, as managers of the branches in the islands and in Central American ports. When he was told that the Creole idea was that all such work should be done by people intended for it, he stared and said nothing.

"My father," she said, "told him about the shipping business as conducted by us. While he was in the place, there were maps and papers and many books of accounts forever spread out upon the tables. And questions! Always questions! At New Orleans," she told Denis coldly, "we are not accustomed to such things. When a person makes a statement, it is believed. No one is asked to produce written proof of his or her word."

However, her father carried himself mildly through it all. It was his thought that this old man had come, perhaps, to search out the source of the many losses the house had undergone, and that it would be as well to do everything he asked. When not putting his never-ending questions, Simon Abernathy had been silent. And hard! He had no understanding of the Moreaus, and, so it appeared, had no wish to understand them. Except in a business way, he wanted nothing of them whatsoever.

"I remembered this visit," said Lois Moreau, "and some months ago when I began inquiring into the strange falling away of the shipping and mercantile business we had carried on for so long, I heard more about it. Mr. Descoings had written shortly afterward to say that it had not been countenanced by the firm; that the New York offices, or those at Perth Amboy, had known nothing of it. To them it was both suspicious and unaccountable. And they asked the New Orleans branch to forget it. They did not understand its meaning, but were on watch against anything that might come of it. If there was anything, they'd immediately let us know."

Denis, one arm along the back of his chair, had listened attentively. "Did they ever mention it again?" he asked.

"There was no record of it—at least, none that I have seen."

"What more was there?"

He spoke very quietly, and this seemed to irritate her.

"My family," she said, "does not concern itself very much with the business. I think I've mentioned that. And so, things are apt to be forgotten. But here in Perth Amboy they seem quite different. The Descoings have long memories; they also know the value of putting things down in writing. My visit with them today has been enlightening."

"If you don't mind, Lois," said Gerard Monselet, "I will interrupt you here."

"I do not wish to be interrupted," she said, her dark eyes flashing. "There have been too many interruptions in this

matter, Gerard, from the first. Too little method has been used."

"But you have now come to a place where accusations begin. Do not forget: you have no proof."

"Proof!" She half arose in her chair. "Have I not the words of both the Descoings, father and son?"

"You've had their words, I feel sure. But what more?"

She turned from him, her head held very high, her expression one of scorn. And she said to Denis Abernathy:

"I placed all my thoughts before the elder Mr. Descoings. He treated me very kindly," she said, "and immediately sent for his son. I repeated what I had said, and they listened carefully."

"You showed them papers, perhaps?" said Denis.

"To be sure! There were many that were quite suspicious in their contents. I'd brought them with me."

"You have them now?"

"Mr. Henri Descoings took them, so that they might be locked in the firm's strong-box."

Denis gestured. "That was a mistake," he said.

"You should not have let them out of your hand," said Gerard Monselet excitedly. "If I had known you had important papers, I should not have permitted it."

She looked at him as a grown person looks at a child.

"Gerard, as you know, you have no talent for business. None of the Monselets have."

"You are not telling me, I hope, that any has been given the Moreaus?"

She flushed at this; there was a leap of anger into her eyes. But again she ignored the young man.

"I found," she said to Denis, "that not only was Simon Abernathy's journey to New Orleans unknown at the time to his partners here, but that they were greatly distressed when they heard it. They had always thought highly of him. He was, they said, a thoroughgoing man of business, and they had placed the utmost trust in him. But he had changed. They never understood it, but he had altered absolutely. They began to find his touch through the whole of the firm's affairs. There were frightening evidences of disorder in the accounts."

"They said this to you?" said Denis, his voice level.

"They said that, and more. They said that now that he was unable to—"

But Monselet again interrupted.

"I will say it," she said, her voice lifting. "Why should I not? If harm is threatened my father, shall I—"

"But you do not know if any of this is true."

LOIS MOREAU looked at him in angry silence; and Denis Abernathy said to Monselet: "If you'd not mind, I'd like to hear what she wants to say."

The young Creole gestured.

"As I feel quite sure you'll hear it anyway, I suppose there's no real use in my objecting."

"I have not come all this way, Gerard, and have not gone to all this trouble, to be warned and talked out of what I've made up my mind to do," said the girl.

"Very well," said Monselet. "I have nothing more to say."

"The Descoings looked carefully into Mr. Abernathy's visit to New Orleans," said Lois Moreau. "And they found his purpose was to arrange certain accountings so that they'd agree with certain others."

"What accountings were these?" asked Denis.

She hesitated. "I do not know."

"My grandfather's part of the business is fixed here in the North," said Denis. "It has always been overland freighting; he dealt with the firm's hauling, and that of any other house that asked for this service. He has, according to what knowledge I have of the matter, never had anything to do with the firm's ocean voyages or shipping interests, here or in the South. That being so, it is a puzzle to me why he should be matching accounts of his own with those of the Moreaus at New Orleans."

"The firm in all its departments has been shamefully robbed," said the girl, her eyes bright with anger, "and your saying that the thing is not easily understood or explained does not alter the facts."

"The facts!" said Denis, and he looked at her composedly. "What facts have been shown you?"

"Mr. Henri Descoings has told me—"

"A moment, please!" Denis stopped her. "I'm not asking what Henri Descoings told you. What proof did he point out to you?"

"I did not send for you to have you question me!" she said furiously. "I will not permit it."

"But," protested Abernathy, "if Descoings has made charges—"

She interrupted him. "He hasn't made charges!"

"Lois!" said Monselet, aghast.

"Gerard, please be quiet," she said.

There was a moment's silence, and then Denis spoke.

"Do you mind if I ask how the things you've mentioned were passed on to you? No proofs were shown! No charges were made! In what way then has Henri Descoings convinced you that my grandfather is guilty of some sort of rascality?"

"When I sat down with Mr. Descoings this afternoon," she said, "I found him to be a very prudent man. It was plain to me at once that he wished to do no one an injury. He had a delicate matter to deal with, and handled it carefully. There were, as I've said, no accusations. But as he went on, it was quite plain what he meant, and whom he meant."

Denis glanced at Monselet; that young man sat with his arms folded, a pained expression on his face.

"I am to understand, then," said Denis to the girl, "there was nothing more than hints; no specific thing was named, no person was pointed at. In other words that Henri Descoings spoke in such a veiled way that he could not, afterwards, be shown to have made any statement whatsoever."

Lois Moreau arose; it was obvious she was fighting back the bitterest resentment; there were tears of anger in her eyes. The two young men also arose.

"It is not true," she said. "You are trying to make me out a fool. And I will not permit it. I will—" In another moment she would have broken down, but just then there came the sound of boot-heels upon the floor. Louis Descoings was in the room, arrogant of manner.

"Hello—what's this?" he demanded. "What the devil's going on here?" He put young Monselet away with a thrust of his arm, and arranged himself at the side of the angry girl. "Something else of yours, is it?" he said to Denis, the intolerant eyes fixed upon the young man's face. "Well, perhaps it's just as well. I'd been hoping for an opportunity—to—"

Young Monselet's touch upon the arm interrupted him.

"I think," Monselet said, "you are taking a great deal upon yourself. This lady is under my protection."

Louis Descoings laughed; it was a sound that had the ugly ring of contempt.

"You were making a rather poor hand of it," he said. "Here she was, with tears on her cheeks, facing this person, and you with not a word in your mouth!" He turned away from the young Creole in brutal scorn, and said to Denis: "I mean to break this stick over those thick shoulders of yours." He balanced the heavy-knobbed cane he carried. "And then I'm going to kick you out of the room."

Denis Abernathy had stood quietly by while these words were being said. There was no haste in his manner; his face was without emotion. Twice on the day before he'd been warned against all contact with this young man; he had not understood why, and he still did not know the immediate reason for the warning. But the thing was firmly in the front of his mind as he said:

"I don't think there will be any need of violence. What business I had here seems about done, and I'll be going."



*"What the devil's going on here?" he demanded.
"Something else of yours?" he said to Denis.*

He nodded to Monselet, who had been listening with astonished chagrin, and bowed to Lois Moreau. She looked at him with a chilly disdain.

"I think we shall meet again," he said to her. "And perhaps before long."

He did not look at Louis Descoings, but turned quietly and left the room.

IT was something like two hours later that Denis Abernathy made his way along a dimly lighted street, tree-bordered and with dark-looking, heavily timbered houses set well back from the street.

He inquired of a passer-by for Mr. Dacre's residence.

"That," said the passer-by, "would be Evans Dacre. His house is that one across the way, where you see the fanlight done in painted glass."

"I thank you," said Denis. And then: "Evans Dacre is in the shipping business with Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy?"

"It is the same. Very likely you'll find him there at this hour. Mr. Dacre is a man who dines late, and seldom stirs away from home afterward."

Denis crossed the street, entered at a wide gate and at the end of a flagged walk found himself at the fanlighted door. He struck a light *rat-tat* with the knocker; there were steps within; the door opened and a woman looked out at him.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Abernathy, if you please," said Denis.

The woman said nothing, and made no motion. It occurred to the young man that she did not hear him; he was about to speak again and in a louder tone when she said:

"Will you come in, please?"

He entered, and she closed the door.

"I will ask if he can be seen," she said. "His health is not good, and he has few visitors."

A lamp burned in the passage. Denis stood waiting after the woman had gone. The house was silent. After a space, a door at one side opened and a man appeared. He was a large man with deliberate movements. A handsome man and with a dignified carriage. At once Denis recognized him as the man he'd seen on the steamer that noon, in company with the horse surgeon, Kipper.

"Mr. Abernathy has been in his rooms for the last few hours," said this person, beaming upon Denis. "He may be asleep. He sometimes dozes in his chair for a while after he comes home of an early evening. But if you'll give me your name, I'll speak to him."

"I'm Denis Abernathy."

"Oh, yes." The man lifted his brows, and seemed much pleased. "His grandson. He told me last night you were in Amboy." The man lowered his voice, and added: "He was much stirred at seeing you. I've never, for a good many years, seen him so gratified. He has been ill for a long time: getting about, to be sure, but quite ill just the same. And a good deal depressed. But,"—nodding smilingly,— "I'll not keep you waiting. I'll tell him you're here."

He ascended the stairs at the end of the passage; in a few moments Denis could hear a gentle knocking on a door. There was a silence; then the knocking was resumed. But louder. There was another pause, longer than the first; then steps sounded on the stairs. The man appeared once more.

"He does not answer," he said. "I'm sorry."

"It's quite all right," said Denis. "I'll speak to him tomorrow."

"I have known him, at times, when he wasn't in the humor for conversation, to make no reply to a knock. But," said Dacre helpfully, "if your business is at all urgent, you might try yourself. Knock, and then speak to him. He may open the door when he hears your voice."

"Very well," said Denis, "I'll go up."

"The door," said Dacre, "is to the left of the staircase on the next floor."

Denis ascended. The passage above was dim, but he saw the door to the left of the stairs plainly enough. A heavy, solid door. And he noticed as he lifted his hand to knock upon it, that the latch had not been caught. There was an inch, perhaps, of opening between the door and the frame. He tapped lightly; then he spoke, saying who he was. But there was no reply. He considered what to do. For a

moment or two he thought it best to leave things as they were. But the door not being fast seemed strange to him, and as he turned about to descend the stairs he stopped; then he knocked and spoke once more. There being no answer, he pushed the door open and looked in. The room was in darkness; the faint light from the open door crept only a short distance inside: the shadows at the far end were deep and mysterious.

Denis paused for a moment. There was a shiver in his blood as he tried to pierce the gloom; it seemed to him that he stood in the presence of some harrowing thing. He stepped out into the passage and looked over the stair-rail. Dacre was still below, evidently waiting to see what would be the result of the renewed knocking. Denis called to him, and he looked up.

"Did you know," said the young man, "that the door was not fast; that it stood open a trifle?"

"Open!" said the man. "Surely not!"

"Bring a light," said Denis. "I'm afraid something has happened."

He stood with his hand on the stair rail, his head turned and his eyes fixed on the blank doorway. The feeling of cold in his blood had not diminished; his scalp prickled, and he found his hands clutching tightly at the rail; his whole body was pitched to a high tension. Then Dacre came up the stairs, carrying a lighted candle in a brass holder.

"What is it?" asked the man. He spoke quietly; and as Denis looked at him, he saw no trace of excitement in his kindly face. "Is he ill?"

Denis took the candle from him, holding it high so that the small yellow blaze would not interfere with his vision.

"I don't know," said the young man. "The room is still. And as I stood in it a few moments ago, it seemed to me that it was not the stillness of sleep."

"What do you mean?" Denis felt the man's hand upon his arm. "Do you think—"

He paused, his voice dying away in a sort of whisper.

DENIS went into the room; the wan rays of the candle flickered through the gloom. He was in the middle of the floor when Dacre suddenly cried out. The young man turned; Dacre was pointing to one side of the room. There was a low, wide bed, and across it lay Simon Abernathy, his mouth open, his hands clenched, his body contorted. Denis went to the bedside; he held the dimly burning candle high and looked down at the dead form, his heart full of bitterness.

"Look!" said Dacre. "The throat!"

Denis, bent low, his hand on the silenced heart, had seen the marks. Deep and wide; the evidence of a horrid grip.

"Strong hands," he said. "Full of power. And behind them was the will to kill." He looked mournfully at the twisted body. "He fought hard for so old a man; see the way the bed is torn. He did not want to die. There were many things he desired to know and do."

The room was in disorder. Things had been overturned and burst open. Denis looked about; his face was drawn and pale.

"Did you hear no sounds?" he asked. "This couldn't have been done without noise."

"There was nothing," said Dacre. "Nothing more than the usual sounds of the house and the street."

"He did not call out?"

"I heard nothing."

"He was taken suddenly," Denis said. "That grip was about his throat before he could speak."

"Murder!" said Dacre, aghast. "Murder in my house!"

"The authorities must be notified," said Denis. "And it would be well if it were done at once."

"I will send word to Justice Hasty," said Dacre. "His house is only a few dozen yards away."

He left the room. Denis saw a half-burnt candle by the bedside. He lighted this, and also kindled several others

that were upon the mantel. Then he stood taking an account of the disorder of the room. Drawers had been pulled out, their contents thrown upon the floor. Closets had been ransacked; a chest had been broken open. There was an iron strong-box at one side; the lock of this had been forced.

Dacre returned in a few minutes. He had sent a message to Justice Hasty's; and as this official was known to be prompt, he'd no doubt be there quite soon. Dacre looked at the huddled form upon the bed, and then at the plundered look of the place.

"A thief!" he said. "Unquestionably a thief."

"And one interested in documents," said Denis. "See how the bundles of papers have been broken open and searched through."

SOUNDS began to reach them from the street; it was evident the messenger sent to summon the justice had spread the news while on his way. Crowds were gathering at the doors and windows below. In a short time there was a sudden lift to its buzz. Justice Hasty had arrived. Almost at once he was in the room; a sharp-looking man, little with a pair of large glasses astride his nose. He was brisk and pointed of manner. There was a gangling young man with him, his clerk, who looked with horror at the dead man on the bed, and clutched himself shiveringly with both arms. Also there was a constable, a dull, elderly man who had been snatched away from his supper, and was in a surly frame of mind.

"Old Simon Abernathy!" said the justice, after a look at the body. "Well, to be sure! So the villains have managed him at last. Three attempts upon him before—I think there were three, Voxer," he said to the constable.

"Yes," said Voxer. "I've got them all down in my book. The last time they tried to strangle him, do you remember? And it's like they've tried it again this evening."

"With success," said Hasty. "This time with marked success." He looked at the clerk. "The name is Simon Abernathy," he said. "Get that down, and stop shivering."

The clerk had a small ink-horn hung from a button of his coat; he dipped his pen into this and wrote the name at the head of a sheet of cap.

"Also put the date down, and state that the said Simon Abernathy was found—who found him?" asked the justice of Dacre.

"His grandson," said Dacre, indicating Denis.

"Denis Abernathy," said the young man.

"Very good," said Justice Hasty. Then to the clerk: "Was found dead in his rooms, where there was"—looking about through the big lenses—"every evidence of foul play, by his grandson Denis Abernathy. The said rooms being in the house of Evans Dacre! And state location of the house," he directed.

The justice, followed around the room by his terror-stricken clerk and the constable, gathered up all the details of the crime with the ease of much practice. The clerk wrote steadily; the constable chewed a straw and gave matters brief and ill-tempered attention. When they had completed their survey, Hasty turned to Denis.

"The county doctor will view the body in the morning," he said. "The cause of death will then be legally determined."

He was still talking when there came a heavy knocking at the front door.

"Voxer," said the justice, "put a stop to that."

Voxer opened one of the windows and demanded to know what was going on. A voice replied: a full voice with an ugly depth of domination. The constable drew in his head and said to Hasty:

"It's young Mr. Descoings. He wants to come in."

"Admit him," ordered Hasty. Voxer started down the stairs. "The news has spread," said the justice. "There

will be much public indignation when this affair becomes generally known. And every effort will be made"—to Denis—"to find the assassins."

He was still talking when the tread of feet was heard on the stairs; then Louis Descoings came into the room. He walked directly by Denis, ignoring him, and paused in front of Justice Hasty.

"What damned scoundrelly work is this?" he demanded. "A well-known and respected citizen foully murdered! Is no one safe these days?" He strode masterfully to the bedside and looked down at the still shape. "Is he really dead?" he asked. "Have you made sure?"

"He's as dead as he'll ever be," said the justice briefly.

"Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy will offer a reward! The person or persons guilty of this crime shall be apprehended. They shall suffer for this, by God! At the end of a rope!"

"I have always said that there is nothing that brings a man-killer face to face with the law more quickly than a substantial reward."

"Offer enough," said Constable Voxer, "and the party's as good as caught already."

"I see," said young Descoings, "there has been, besides the crime of murder, an attempt, at least, at robbery." He looked about at the scattered papers, the looted strong-box and chest. "I shall direct the proper persons, from the offices of the firm, to remove all these papers to a safe place. At the same time I shall have the body—"

But at this moment Denis Abernathy interrupted him.

"One moment," Denis said. He looked at Justice Hasty. "I'm afraid Mr. Descoings is moving a bit too fast, and decidedly in the wrong direction."

The justice looked at him through his big lenses, his head cocked inquiringly to one side.

"What have you to say?" he asked.

"These papers, being in my grandfather's private apartment, more than likely have nothing to do with the firm. And being private papers, I, his only relative, should be placed in charge of them."

THE justice, still with his head to one side, looked at young Descoings. "Have you anything to add to what you've already said?" he asked.

"I have seen this man before," said Louis Descoings, a look of cold amusement in his face. "And I doubt, from what I've seen, that he's related in any way to Mr. Abernathy. The old gentleman was a person not easily put down, for all his age and disabilities. This man," indicating Denis, "appeared in the town yesterday. He is a stranger here. I doubt if anyone can vouch for him."

Denis permitted nothing that he felt to appear in his manner or his look.

"If given a little time," he said quietly, "I'll prove I am the person I claim to be."

"That," said Louis Descoings, to Justice Hasty, "may take weeks or even months before it can be shown one way or the other. It would not be advisable to leave what may be valuable papers in the hands of someone who may be shown to be a cheat."

Justice Hasty had listened to these words with brows uplifted; and now he turned to Denis as though expecting an outburst of some sort. But Denis stood motionless and apparently unmoved.

"I'll not ask that the papers be turned over to me," he said. "I'll merely suggest that the courts seal this room and place a guard over it while the matter is pending."

"That," said Hasty, "is quite likely the answer. At any rate, it shall be so arranged until a decision is given. . . . Voxer, you are in charge here until a court officer can affix the seals. I'll have a deputy relieve you at midnight. Also the county doctor shall view the remains and see to their removal as soon as possible."

The next installment of this story of the old freighting days will appear in the forthcoming November issue.

SECRET NO. Y-23

*A writer new to these pages offers a lively tale of
counter-espionage here in America.*

by William Brandon



JONATHAN said: "This is Annabel Sims."

"A pretty name," the whack approved. "A fine, clean-limbed American girl. Lady, I salute thee." He saluted Annabel. "I will carry thee with me always as a vision, a vision of—of—"

"Loveliness," Annabel prompted.

"Loveliness, tall, clear-eyed, dewy-eyed, hair like burnished—er—"

"Copper?"

"Don't say that word. Priorities."

The little table swayed as the whack leaned on it with both hands and went on talking slackly out of a colorless mouth in a colorless face. "Fresh, clear, dewy," he muttered, "fine, clean-limbed American girl, I salute thee." He saluted again, with some difficulty. "Future happy matron. Future contented mother." He began to weep. "I see it all." He turned to Jonathan and asked: "Do you mind if I speak in the seven tongues? The gift is on me." And he went away, wringing his hands.

"Well," Annabel said, "I've always wanted to spend an evening on a Washington hotel roof. They always say you meet such interesting people. Do you suppose he's one of the big brains?"

At a table behind them someone said, "Look! There's Leon Henderson," and pointed out a pudgy tourist from Omaha at a near-by table. Another voice objected, saying Mr. Henderson had bags under his eyes and this figure did not. A lively argument flamed, with bets being laid and a waiter dispatched to ask the pudgy gentleman his name and settle things. Across a dance-floor an orchestra played, not softly; the tables around them were crowded and noisy; the night overhead was cloud-filled, muggy and kept away by glass.

Jonathan was morose. "I still have two more days," he said. "I don't know why I'm spending them here. I should be studying."

"Studying what?"

"How the hell should I know? I haven't got any idea what they'll want me to do."

"Let's dance," Annabel said.

"If you will tell me," Jonathan demanded, "what a full professor of English Literature will do here in the War Department working for Army Intelligence, I'll—"

"Here we go again. Jonathan, you have now asked me that question at least a hundred and seventeen times, and you must know I'm scarcely qualified to answer it, and I'm sure that in normal times you would frown upon mere rhetorical questions. What are you worried about, anyway? I should think you'd be pleased. You'll be right in the thick of things."

"I'm not worried."

"Well, then, irritated."

"Why, if I'm going to do something, I'd like to do something useful. I don't like to think about going into a job where I am certain to fluff my duff, since I know nothing about even the essentials of the work. I wasn't trained for it, whatever it will be, and I will wind up looking like a chump."

Annabel smiled mischievously.

"Oh! The ego is apprehensive! Your vanity imperiled. I see. Well, knowing you, darling, I can see now why you're in such a state. My goodness! The great Jonathan Jaffrey is going to be a chump. I must rush back to the university and spread the news."

"Leave my ego out of this," Jonathan said grimly. "And the university, for that matter." He drank gloomily. "I'll probably never see the old dump again. Old Nessenden was pretty sharp about that leave of absence all the way. If I'd been a mathematician going into Ordnance, now, he'd have hammered me out a plaque of honor. He seems to think this is a sort of vacation, and I expect he'd like to charge it up against my sabbatical—if they don't just get another boy, regardless! You can't blame

him for being suspicious. What business would a professor of English Literature have in Army In—"

"If you must keep fishing for praise, I'll be your stooge, but I don't like it. Army Intelligence asked for you because of the stupendous grasp of criminal psychology displayed in your late notorious treatise, 'Murder and the Criminal Mind.' There! Happy? You had to fill out one of those things, didn't you, that they sent to all the professors? You must have put down that you were a criminologist in your spare time, and an expert on such things as why Burke burked. . . . Oh, listen, there's a waltz. That's more in your league. Let's jig."

Jonathan rose, absent-mindedly forgetting to pull out Annabel's chair for her. He disbelieved in such mannerisms, anyway. Logic pointed out that an adult female was far stronger than a child, yet you were not supposed to scrape chairs and open doors for kids; ergo, why dames? He said: "That's only my hobby. Nessenden's never even heard of me as a criminologist. So why should Army Intelligence?"

"Dr. Nessenden doesn't read the newspapers, and I imagine Army Intelligence does. You've really become a quite famous sleuth, in a Sunday-supplement sort of way. You should read them yourself. . . . Jonathan, why don't you dance? Your feet are acting funny."

Jonathan moved around, with Annabel light in his arms. Dancing, he thought, another illogical tribal pastime. If you want exercise, why not run around the block? Fresher air, less expensive. . . . Something was wrong with him. He stopped dancing. A couple bumped into him. Annabel shook his elbow and spoke in alarm. His knees caved, and he went down on his face on the floor.

HE awoke in a strange room. Sunlight was gleaming around the edges of shades drawn at the windows, but the room was in semi-darkness.



He could make out maple furniture: a chair, a dressing-table, the bed he was in—plasterboard ceiling and blue-flowered wallpaper.

He was powerfully hungry, and otherwise felt fine. He threw back the covers: blankets, a patchwork quilt, sheets with blue needlework initials. He was wearing purple pajamas which were several sizes small. His clothes were not in the room. He reached out and picked up the chair and hammered on the floor.

Distant footsteps approached his room; the door opened, and Annabel entered, dressed in denim overalls.

"Where am I?" Jonathan growled.

Annabel said soothingly: "Everything is all right. But you must stay under the covers." She tried to push him back in bed, and ceased, looking at his eyes. "Oh, Jonathan, are you all right again?"

"I don't know. What the hell is all this?"

"You've been sick. Are you really all right? Jonathan, do you know me? Who am I? No, look at me. Who am I?"

Jonathan looked at her and breathed deeply. "Give me a hint."

"My initials are A.S. Oh, Jonathan, I thought you were out of it. Your eyes looked all right."

"Anne Boleyn? Barbara Frietchie? Susie Medusa?"

She checked a dry sob and looked at him with suspicion. "Jonathan, if

you're fooling me, all right for you! You have no idea how I've worried." She studied him critically. "I know you're well. Your eyes aren't glazed any more."

"A little more of this, and they will be. I want to know where I am. What happened last night? I passed out; what then?"

"Not last night. It's been four nights now. Don't you really remember anything? You've been sick."

Jonathan looked incredulous.

"Sick? I feel great. Sick with what?"

"A nervous breakdown. You've been awfully sick. The doctor said you might have eaten something bad, that started it. And then, with all your worrying—"

Jonathan saw Annabel blazing away, flinching with each shot.

"Nervous breakdown, nuts! I don't have nervous breakdowns."

"Well, you've been delirious. The doctor said you'd have to get to a quiet place and rest, so I brought you up here to Vermont. You're at my Uncle Arthur's and Aunt Minnie's. You've heard me talk about them."

"Thus your pants," Jason said, reassured. "They were the worst part of it. Well, I'm all right now, so—Four days! I was supposed to report to the War Department two days ago! Give me my clothes! Why in blazes did you take me out of Washington?"

"Jonathan, get back into bed! I reported for you. I told a Colonel Somebody you were sick, and he said if you got well within a week, to get in touch with a man named Boston,

at Jordan University, in Jordan, Vermont. That's why I thought of bringing you up here. I told the Colonel where you'd be, and he said he'd send Mr. Boston around to see you, and he's downstairs now. I was just telling him you were still sick."

"Who's downstairs now? The Colonel?"

"Mr. Boston. Or Captain Boston. He's very distinguished-looking, and he's wearing a uniform. Do you really feel well enough to see him? Well, don't get up. I'll just send him in here. He looks busy, and I don't think he has much time to spare."

CAPTAIN BOSTON did indeed give the impression of a man about to miss the next plane out. Jonathan had raised the shades while Annabel was gone, and had placed the chair in the oblong of sunlight on the floor, but the Captain did not sit. He accepted Jonathan's preliminary pleasantries about being a hell of a recruit for Intelligence, sick in bed and delirious, and remarked that he was something of a fish out of water himself without a teacup in his hand, having spent his career to date as a military attaché.

"To get to essentials, Dr. Jaffrey," glancing at his watch, "I am instructed to tell you that your formal entry into the service is pending, but in the meantime the service would like to have your informal cooperation. Of course, you have been thoroughly investigated and selected for this business because you appear to be the best fitted of those under consideration. You understand that what I am saying is confidential."

"The Office of Scientific Research and Development has farmed out work on a new weapon to half a dozen various university laboratories, of which the physics lab at Jordan University is one. Recently we learned that the enemy has received some information concerning this thing—which is, by the way, an aircraft detector which may prove valuable and may not; I couldn't give you any technical details concerning it, because I haven't any. We know it as Y-23. Since it looked like a case of military espionage, the O.S.R.D. turned it over to us, and we have traced the leak to Jordan University; but we are naturally hesitant to brace any of the eminent professors there with anything like an accusation."

"We wanted a university man—but not a physicist, as that would be obvious—who would know his way about in the academic world, and at the same time be capable of undertaking something like undercover work, which is a field foreign to the average educator, I expect. Your method of approach here in Jordan, and at the university, will be entirely up to you. You know more about how to pick up informa-

tion around a university than I could tell you."

"You understand that nothing of great moment stands to be lost by the enemy learning whatever the Jordan lab knows about Y-23, as the university here is only concerned with one phase of the device, anyhow."

"What we are principally interested in finding out is who among these scientists—all of whom, of course, have been investigated and have apparently solid backgrounds—is a traitor, and how the information is being transmitted. I'll get in touch with you again within a week"—he plucked his lip—"here at this farmhouse. Best place, probably. Who is the young lady?"

"My secretary."

Captain Boston said, "Oh," with an odd look, made his farewells, said he hoped Jonathan would have something for him at the end of a week, and hurried out.

Just like that, Jonathan thought, he was become a counter-espionage agent. A pending one, at least. Well, he knew a couple of instructors, and the Spalding Chair of Philology at Jordan; he should be able to stage a fair snoop for the guy selling out Y-23.

Annabel came in and tactfully neglected to ask what had transpired in his official interview. She had put on an attractive white linen dress.

She asked: "Do you feel like getting up? Uncle Arthur and Aunt Minnie would probably like to meet you on your feet."

Jonathan climbed out of bed and asked for his clothes and she brought them from a closet. He said: "What did you tell them about me?"

"I said I was your amanuensis. They looked askance on it too, I can tell you. But they're lambs; they'll put up with anything from me; I'm their favorite poor relation. Dinner will be waiting by the time you're ready, so hurry. Bye."

She went out, and Jonathan looked at the door for a while, lost in reverie. He had never seen Annabel in a domestic setting before. She was a good kid. He had liked the overalls. Indicated she could work.

Uncle Arthur was a shriveled little man, bent from hard work, with the map of Vermont on his spare bony face. Aunt Minnie looked like his twin sister, with glasses. Another case in point on the thesis of married people growing to look alike through the years. Without basis in reason, but indubitable. Talkative, humorous, their faces never giving away a thing; Jonathan would have enjoyed subjecting the honest old couple to prolonged observation. Aunt Minnie had a twitch in one eye and a liking for chromos with plenty of red in them; some ancient repression there. Suppose a woman had always desired to dance with a

rose in her teeth and a knife in her garter, and wound up instead among the drab tones of a gray and green farm? Still, butchering-time should afford a release. . . .

"You look well now," Aunt Minnie said, happily unaware of his thoughts. "You were a pretty sick young man. You'd better just sit down here on this sofa and rest till dinner's ready. Won't be a minute now."

Jonathan obeyed. He was a little weak on his feet. Uncle Arthur said, "Here, let me get this out of your way," and picked some of Aunt Minnie's sewing up from the sofa. Jonathan saw that the sewing was a pillow-cover, half finished, in dull white silk, and remarked on it.

Uncle Arthur chuckled. "Pretty, aint it? I found that piece of cloth hanging to a fence-post up the road here, week or so ago. Minnie said 'twas too good to go to waste, and washed it up and's using it. Don't have any idea where it came from."

"Nice stuff," Jonathan said, leaning forward and studying the pillow with interest. "It's parachute silk."

Uncle Arthur frowned. "It's what? You mean piece of a parachute?"

Jonathan nodded. "Had any aviation accidents around here lately?"

"Lord, no. Never had one." Uncle Arthur looked at him aside, suspecting a rib. "That stuff was just snagged there on the fence, that's all." He grinned, deciding to adopt it as a joke. "If someone floated down in it I guess they'd have snagged there too, hey?" He laughed.

"Looks like it," Jonathan admitted, and they were called in to dinner, which was a royal one, with a baked chicken, sweet potatoes candied in maple syrup, and a number of other items. Jonathan did not enjoy it as he had anticipated, since Annabel kept him strictly to a minimum, saying the doctor had ordered a very light diet and light exercise for some time. Accordingly he left the house after dinner in a not pleasant humor, and Annabel drove him in Uncle Arthur's car the eleven miles to Jordan University.

JACK BRIGGS, chemistry instructor and an old-time roomie, was glad to see him. Amenities past, Jack said: "I've been expecting you to show up. So you're an Intelligence agent now? Seen anything of Mata Hari?"

Jonathan looked taken aback. "Who told you?"

"About your job with the Army? Why, I don't know. It's all over the school. Something about some dope on some hush-hush thing the physics lab is working on being stolen, and you on your way to fill the breach. I read that book of yours about murder. Very ripe stuff. Guaranteed to make every reader feel like a killer. Wondered how you did it."



"American girl, I salute thee. . . . Future happy matron. Future contented mother. I see it all."

"Wait a minute. 'This business of mine being all over the school—how'd it get that way? Who told you?"

Jack Briggs laughed. "Were you supposed to drift in, in secret? Good Lord! Why, I think your boss Nessenenden wrote old Gaylord something about your leaving to join Army Intelligence; they're old buddies; he probably only mentioned it in a letter. Then there's been this talk about dirty work on this war stuff physics is busy on; I suppose they've been expecting somebody up to dig into them and when Gaylord went around blating about you, an English Lit man, going into Army Intelligence, the two things must have got coupled together, the way rumors do, until they had it that you were on your way up here to work on us. . . . And it turns out to be right. Or is it?"

Jonathan said bitterly: "Well, they could have met me with a brass band."

"You don't need to worry about co-operation, Johnny. I think you'll find everyone here willing to give you all the help you need."

"I can see that." Jonathan picked up his hat. "Any school likes its gossip but you people here could put the blast on a sewing-bee." He was wondering what Captain Boston would do in a situation like this, an undercover man waking up with his covers gone. Probably be in a hurry. "If it's possible, Jack, though I doubt it, don't say anything about my being here."

"You do me an injustice, old man. My lips are sealed to the grave. Will I see you later?"

"I'll be wearing a false mustache," Jonathan said. "Don't pretend to recognize me." Briggs laughed loudly.

"Ha-ha. Good joke!" Jonathan went on out and found Annabel and the car.

"I've just had an experience," Annabel said. "I've been shot at."

Jonathan stared at her.

She showed him the bullet-hole through the hood of the car.

"I didn't hear any shot. Just a crack and a smack, and I saw a splinter fly. I suppose they thought it was you sitting in the car."

HE looked around at the peaceful ivy-covered buildings drowsing in a peaceful New England afternoon sun. Red-tipped stakes were still set up along the driveways, not having been removed since the winter, when they served as markers in the snow. The trees were leafing out. A few students passed, throwing books at each other.

"Out of reason," Jonathan said irritably. "There's probably a rifle-range around a corner some place. A stray bullet."

"Yes," Annabel said, a little pallid in the cheeks, "they're so common around a campus." She started the car. "And now where?"

"Drive around to the administration building. I want you to go in and get a faculty roster. And kick up a beef."

"About what?"

"You lost something valuable in the physics lab. The janitor reported that he found it and now you've learned that he forgot to turn it in to lost and found and took it home with him. You have to have it back right now, so

you want to know his name and home address."

She frowned at him. "What the heck is that for?"

"I want to know the janitor's name and home address. Janitors are academic jaybirds; they don't miss anything that goes on around them; the place to go if you want to learn all about a department is to the janitor."

"Oh, very astute, although I don't know what it's about. But why don't you ask officially for his name and simply go and interview him? Or are you just after reactions?"

"I don't want to interview him officially. You don't get anything out of a janitor with official questions. You have to catch him over his beer and crackers and start a conversation about Fuller's earth and the best types of brooms, or if he happens to be a postgrad, with remarks in an appropriately higher sphere. That gets him to griping about his work and you gripe with him. Presently you've got all the dirt on the entire school."

Annabel had lost interest. "Don't you think you've worked enough for one day? The doctor said light exercise. And besides, there's someone following us, in a green car."

Jonathan watched through the rear window. "Nerves, my child. This will be administration. Park here and chase inside."

"At least," Annabel pleaded, "don't sit in the car. You make a lovely target."

"I live right," Jonathan said. "Blow." He watched her trot up the

broad steps to the building's entrance and saw her look back at him worriedly. Too much imagination; a feminine characteristic. He thought about janitors. The other top-drawer shot for information would be the night watchman, but that ancient breed of copper was suspicious by nature and would be hard to deal with.

He watched for a green car to drive by, but none appeared.

WITHIN a few minutes Annabel returned and handed him a printed pamphlet. She said: "I told them it was Herbert's pin. I must have it back, I said. It's simply life or death. You don't realize the fix I'm in."

"That wasn't necessary. You probably overdid it."

"Well, his name is George Grey, and he lives in a tenement at 157 Ackerman street. Only up here a tenement isn't a tenement, but a house. So it means he is probably a good, thrifty worker and doesn't drink, so you won't be able to catch him over his beer."

"We'll go see," Jonathan said. Annabel put the car out in traffic, called through the window to a passer-by to ask the location of Ackerman Street, and aimed for it. Jonathan scrutinized names and titles of the science faculty. Some were familiar to him but were none that he knew personally. There had been a Schneitzler once, an instructor in the science department at home, who had been discovered in 1937 to be an unregistered German agent and an undesirable alien and had been deported. The matter had created quite a furor over the university teacups; a general protestation of faith coupled with irrelevant inflammatories about academic freedom. Those days seemed very long ago. There was no Schneitzler on the Jordan faculty, or any other name that struck a chord of suspicion in his sensorium; he had heard at various times via academic gossip of this or that teacher who was thought to lean too much this or that way politically; apparently Jordan sheltered none of these, if, indeed, there were any left at large any place. . . . Jonathan pocketed the list and heard Annabel saying:

"... the next street."

"What next street?"

"That green car. It's following us. But it's not behind us." As Jonathan turned again to watch through the rear window: "It's on the next street over, parallel to this one. It can see us at each cross street and follow us the way."

They came to an intersection and Jonathan peered down to the next street on the left, and, in the stream of traffic a block away, thought he saw a green coupé traveling in their direction. He saw also blue, black, maroon and yellow cars, and a delivery truck painted white.

"There's no doubt of it," he said. "We are in grave peril. There is also an observation plane lurking overhead, doubtless radioing our course, and I think I see a submarine."

"All right. Laugh. But I've got intuition."

"I know. That's what makes women lousy card-players. Your intuition is nothing more than a preconception of the kind of life an Intelligence agent should lead, a preconception conditioned, as such things usually are, by general misinformation. An interesting mental reflex. It is as if I were to say 'ante bellum'; your mind instantly calls up a stock picture, a preconception, of the *Old South*—its hoopskirts, crinoline, mansions in creeping vines and darkies holding fine horses in the turning-ring, yet I doubt that that represents a very true shot of the place and period, which must certainly have been more complex."

"I love to hear you sound off," Annabel said. "You make such silly things sound important. Will you watch the house numbers? One-fifty-seven will be on your side of the street."

Jonathan picked out the number, a red frame house; Annabel stopped the car and he walked across the street and knocked on 157's door. He planned on announcing himself as a canvasser preparing a city directory, thus providing a casual conversational opening to talk of the janitor's job.

However, George Grey was apparently not at home; no one answered the door. It was too early for him to have reported for his janitorial duties; he might well be in the corner ginmill at that.

Jonathan turned away, and a woman next door came out on her porch and said, "Was you looking for Mr. Grey? I expect you'll find him at the university."

Jonathan looked at his watch. "I thought he worked nights."

"Oh, he does. He's a graduate student too, though, and goes to school parts of the daytimes. If he aint at the university he's at the airport. He belongs to a flying-club. There aint anyone home there now. I come over and clean for him, you know."

"Oh," Jonathan said, who didn't know. This janitor seemed to be something of a hotshot. "Well, thank you."

"Not at all," the woman said, "not at all." She started to return indoors and spoke to someone within her house and called after Jonathan: "Say, his car just came up around in back, I guess, if you want to see him."

Jonathan thanked her again and walked between the two houses to the back yard. In an alley he saw a green coupé parked, empty. He suddenly decided there might be something to Annabel's intuition, whether it necessarily followed any logic or not, and went up the back steps and silently in-

to the back porch to reconnoiter before he should knock on the back door.

The back door was standing open and he went into a gloomy, untidy kitchen. There were sounds overhead, hasty, quick sounds, someone moving back and forth across a room in a hurry. He went through to the next room looking for the stairway and saw it through an archway, and saw a man evidently waiting in impatience, glancing upward from time to time.

There was something familiar about him, although it took Jonathan a moment to place him. And then he remembered that he had seen this man, drunk, on the Jackson Roof, in Washington, on the night of his nervous breakdown. The drunk who had come to their table and passed remarks on Annabel, and leaned on the table while he talked, with his hand near Jonathan's drink; and a few minutes later Jonathan had passed out and been sick and delirious for four days, and the disquieting thought struck him that this man had tried to poison him, possibly to kill him. At that moment the man at the stairway turned, Jonathan saw his colorless face change expression, and without warning the man charged through the archway, yelling. A hell of a way to greet an old acquaintance, Jonathan thought, and he jabbed with his left as the man lunged at him.

The weakness of his sickness was still on him. His left hand turned the other's head around but did not stop him. Jonathan heard someone running down the stairs. He hooked his right solidly into the one-time drunk's belly and saw a pistol in the man's right hand and kicked at it and missed. Another figure appeared at the archway and Jonathan froze in astonishment, gaping at him; then a gun was smashing behind him—once, twice,—a big gun, with a muzzle blast that shook the room. Jonathan flung away from his opponent and saw Annabel in the kitchen entrance with a shotgun, a pump gun, blazing away with both eyes closed, flinching at each shot.

JONATHAN ducked, got his hand under the gunbarrel and thrust it up, wrenching it out of her hands, and when he had turned again the two men had gone; he heard them racing around the house and an instant later heard the green coupé take off.

Annabel opened her eyes. "Oh," she said. "Jonathan, you're alive."

"Good shooting," Jonathan said, feeling pale.

"Did I hit anything? I had to follow you when you came around to the back. I was afraid. Did you recognize that man you were fighting with? He was the one, that night on the roof in Washington—"

Jonathan was looking for a telephone. "Where did you get that gun?"

"It's Uncle Arthur's. I thought I had better put it in the car when we started out. I didn't tell you, because the doctor said not to worry you, but he told me when you were sick that you had probably been poisoned. So you see it wasn't all intuition."

Jonathan found a phone, called the Jordan airport, was connected with a member of the Civil Air Patrol and spoke for some minutes, giving detailed instructions. He hung up and called Washington.

"BUT who is he?" asked Annabel, who had followed to the phone. "Probably George Grey. Probably the janitor. Probably a spy. When we saw him in Washington he was down there for the express purpose of keeping me from coming up here."

"But you can't be that important. What harm would it do if you did come up here? You don't mean to say that your very name struck terror to their hearts!"

"I don't know," Jonathan said. "I don't know, but I think we'll find out that this janitor was just small fry. I think we'll find out his main job was to harbor and abet the bigger fry. He may even have given the bigger fry access to the university laboratories, where certain war experiments are going forward. It would be my guess that on some nights George Grey stayed home from work and let the bigger fry go and hold down his janitor's job for him; that would be the easiest way. That's why they had to keep me away. If I should show up and see this phony janitor, this Number One spy, at work, I would yell 'copper' on the spot. If they couldn't keep me away he would have to crawl out of sight and he thought his work too necessary to stop."

"But why? Why should he know you'd detect him?"

"I knew him: Man named Schneitzler; used to be on our faculty. I've not seen him since '37 when he left the country by request. The most interesting point right now is how he got back in again; and I think I know. He was doing all right too, until he heard I was coming up here on the prod and he knew I would recognize him. He couldn't have that so he sent his batboy down to Washington to take care of me. Strange to think of Schneitzler reaching that kind of importance. Little guy with buck teeth. Well, you saw him; he was the one with the suitcases, just showed up when you started shooting." He got his Washington connection and after a great deal of confusion made his message clear and told his story in some detail.

He concluded, as Annabel looked on, indignant: "I thought the most important angle would be the method of communication. I think Schneitzler came in by parachute. Well, I think

"Was you looking for Mr. Grey? I expect you'll find him at the university."



there is evidence pointing to it, and the information taken out must have included drawings that couldn't be radioed anyway, so it was reasonable to suspect a physical contact. There must be some sort of a base off the coast; maybe a plane-carrying submarine; maybe a disguised freighter with a catapult. George Grey is a private pilot and he may have made periodic trips out to the base to drop information. That's why I let them get away. They'd make for the airport to escape but the Army planes are after them; they haven't a chance to get away."

"YES," Jonathan said, in answer to something. He looked pleased. "Well, thank you."

When he hung up, Annabel said accusingly: "You should see yourself expanding. I could almost hear them praising you. And you let them believe you worked it out!"

The telephone rang, and Jonathan answered. It was the airport, informing him that George Grey and a passenger had taken off hurriedly, as pre-

dicted, and a plane was endeavoring to tail them.

"You didn't have any idea who that janitor was," Annabel was continuing. "And you'd feel pretty silly if people knew you were looking for them while they were following you and you only caught them because you just happened to stop here and scare them into doing the wrong thing and trying to run away when you weren't even after them. But you just sit there like a cat licking cream, taking credit. Shame on you! And you were afraid to take the job because you said you'd look like a chump."

"Did I say that?" Jonathan asked. He got up from the telephone. He was to stay with the house until Captain Boston arrived to conduct a search of it. Then he could get on a train and sleep. They wanted him to report in Washington tomorrow—and *hurry-hurry* was the watchword.

The

HAD we known our history better, we should have realized before Pearl Harbor that the Japanese, as a nation, do not shrink from committing murder. Consider, for example, this remarkable story of Korea and its tragic Queen.



NEVER could the sons of Dai Nippon stand criticism, and in this case there were occidental witnesses. World censure was mounting. Murder, even at imperial command, was not to be condoned. They must save face. So the trial was held at Hiroshima local court, Yoshida Yoshihide presiding. Some forty persons faced charges—the well-born, the lesser ones, and the *soshi*, those sweepings of jails and streets who would do any kind of dirty work for any kind of pay.

Tamura Yoshiharu, clerk of the court, called the first in importance.

"Name?"

"Viscount General Miura."

"Occupation?"

"I am a soldier of the Son of Heaven."

"That is your profession. What was your occupation at the time given in the charges?"

"I was Minister of Legation at Seoul."

"You went there to carry on the work of Count Inouye?"

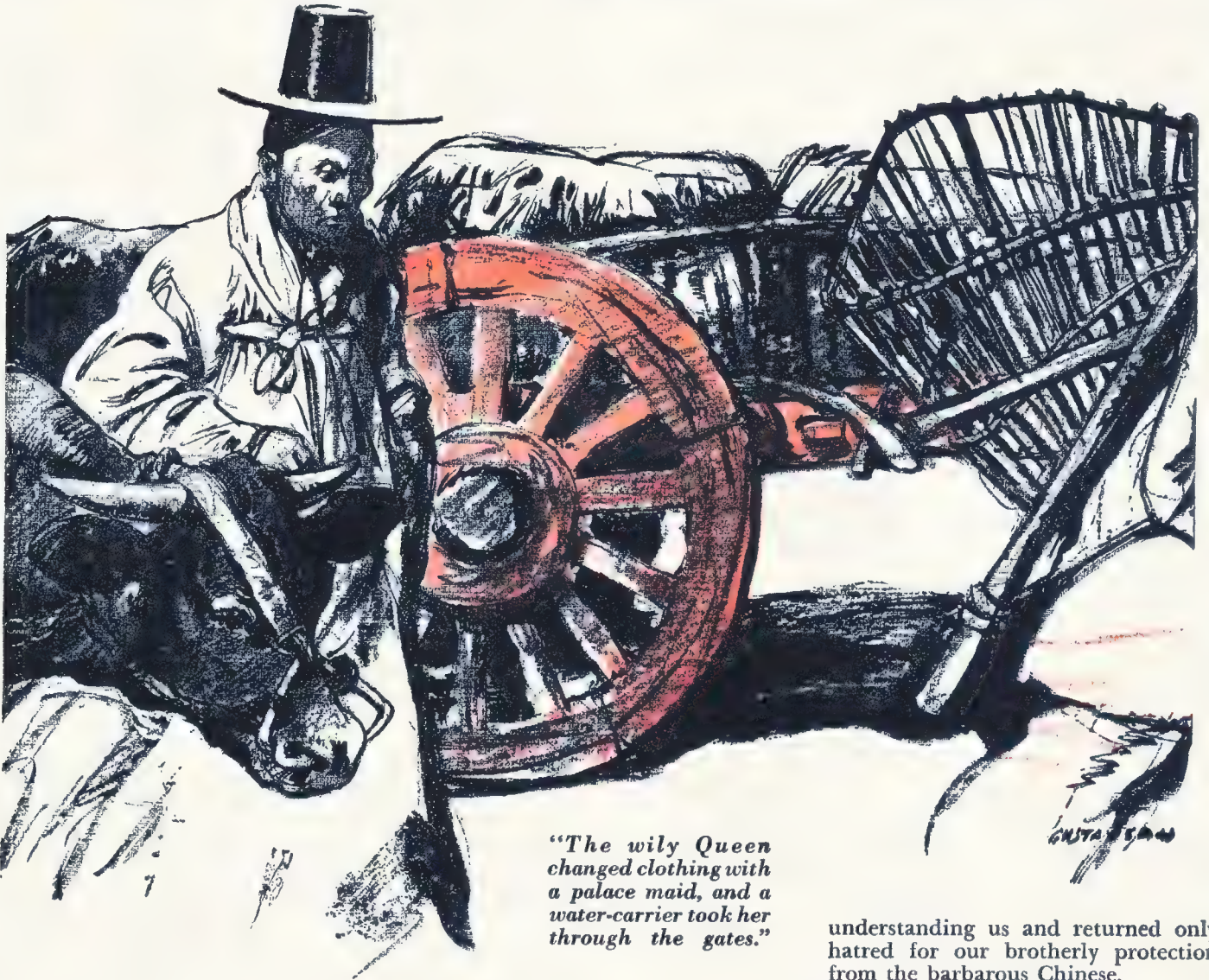
(Sarcastically) "He was a gentleman, too soft to pursue the Imperial interests—"

"Give answers to what you are asked. Tell the court what conditions you found on taking up your work."

"I knew before going to Seoul how many years had been lost to us by the

Bell of Chong=No

by Granville Church



"The wily Queen changed clothing with a palace maid, and a water-carrier took her through the gates."

velvet hand. Since our attempt thirteen years ago, and again ten years ago, to seize—

"Be careful what you say!"

"Perhaps I had better go farther back. The court must understand Japan's excessive patience over the centuries and Korea's ungrateful incivility. For nearly seventeen hundred years, since the expedition of our revered Empress Regent Jingo, Korea has been our vassal. It is only right and natural that this should be so. Yet they have obstinately refused to realize this and persisted in looking to China as a parent state, especially since

Ni Taijo gained the throne of Korea five hundred years ago. Why, they have even failed to pay tribute most of this time!

"We have been obliged more than once to send expeditions to enforce our rights of suzerainty and trade. Less than three hundred years ago, to punish Korea, we were forced to lay waste the whole country—destroy their crops, kill their stock and what people dared to oppose us, burn their towns and villages, sack their palaces and libraries, and bring their artisans to Japan. This was the least punishment their crimes deserved. Yet they persisted in mis-

understanding us and returned only hatred for our brotherly protection from the barbarous Chinese.

"Upon the rebirth of our glorious Empire nearly thirty years ago we again peacefully tried to persuade the Koreans that it is we who are their rightful overlords, but only a war with China would persuade them, and unfortunately we were not then ready for war with China.

"However, we did succeed in planting thousands of—ah—settlers throughout the country to prepare the way, and meantime we did also oblige the Koreans to open additional ports to commerce with us and to grant us concessions to develop their resources.

"Then, at the time of the—ah—revolution in Korea thirteen years ago

we secured a convention admitting a permanent body of Japanese troops to protect our nationals. Thus, as the court can see, we were gradually bringing order out of chaos and establishing the basis for a reorganization of Korea's affairs more friendly to our interests.

"Yet, imagine this! The wicked Queen was very ungrateful for all we were doing for her country, and by sneaking and conniving in every underhanded manner she gradually increased the numbers of her family in positions of power and so gracelessly interfered with affairs of state that her efforts were causing disorder and confusion in the organization we were building up for governing the country.

"Also at that time she persuaded the King to enter into commercial and diplomatic treaties with western countries, which brought several diplomatic staffs to Seoul. The first of these treaties was with the United States of

America. A direct and ignominious slap at us was this. The court can readily understand how relations between Korea and the United States might some day produce embarrassment to the Son of Heaven—"

"The court cautions you again, Viscount Miura! Some of this is history, some of it a matter of opinion. Just tell the court the facts that confronted you on taking up your duties at Seoul."

"I talked with Fukashi Sugimura, Secretary of Legation, at great length. I found him quite out of patience with the willful interference of the Queen. We had succeeded after much effort in having many public offices filled with our men, and the Queen planned to replace them. Why, she even proposed to disband the *Kurentai*, the native troops we trained and officered with our own men after disbanding their old army. This was really insupportable!"

"What did you do?"

"First, the court must understand that the present Min usurpation of power goes back about thirty years—"

THIRTY years. Three decades. A crisis had arisen at the capital. Chul-chong, King of Cho-sen, lay ill, and he had no heir. This was bad news to the people.

"Aiee!" they wailed, in town and village alike. "This means quarrels among the *yangban*, and fighting, and we are the ones who suffer. Aiee!"

Not so this time, however, for the King had a kinsman who had a son. Bad news to one can be good news to another, and Ni Kung hastened to the capital to see what he could do.

He found all Seoul astir. In the streets and public places paid sorcerers were casting spells to propitiate the demons who had brought on this catastrophe. At the palace was more beating of drums, and weird incantations, and strange dances to appease the evil spirits. There was much scurrying through the hard-trodden court-

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



"How now!" exclaimed the King. "Today I find you beautiful. Yesterday you were not so beautiful."

yards, lamentations, the buzz of gossip, whisperings behind columns and fretted screens.

The King's apartments reflected a measure of the same confusion, though here were no sorcerers since the King preferred his favorite geomancer, as gentlemen did. Milling here were his closer confidants, and, of course, members of the *yangban*, the noble clans—the Min, So, Kim, Hong, Pak, and others.

Into all this confusion rushed Ni Kung and scattered the throngs right and left in wholly outraged fashion.

"Out, you graceless buzzards!" he shouted. "Out, you sycophants waiting for the death! This is no *kugung** of the streets. Would you hurry him, you miserable ones? I am his kinsman. I shall see that he lives to punish you. Out, or I'll have your heads piked on the West Gate!"

HE fought his way into the inner chamber and summarily ejected the King's chief eunuch and his favorite fortuneteller, and when after a time he emerged he wore his cloak of grief like a martyr.

"The *Hap-mun*** has been gathered to his ancestors," he announced, with tears streaming. "Here is his last wish: He has issued a final proclamation which orders that my son become King and I his Regent until he is of age. Here is the document, and here the Great Seal of State. Hear and obey!"

There was instant consternation. Ni Kung was not the most admirable character. A nephew of the King, to be sure, but he hadn't been in favor at court. He was dissolute and crafty, overweening even in ruin, bitter and scheming.

The document he waved before the King's ministers and nobles was too long and too neatly done to have been the work of the King, especially in the time that had elapsed; and in spite of all the lamentations and incantations, the King was not so ill as to have died quite so quickly—of natural causes.

Yet it was a fact that the King could not have lasted long. Also, Dowager Queen Cho, turning her back on Cho Sung, her nephew and the presumed heir apparent, upheld the averred wishes. And her influence counted. The *yangban* were so relieved that Ni Kung aspired only to the regency, which could last but a few years, and that it was a boy of twelve who was to be King—a boy of twelve can be influenced, surely—that they hesitated. Possession of the Great Seal and royal emblems did the rest.

So the deal went through, and Ni Kung—or Yi Ha-eung, Prince of Heung

Song—assumed the rare title of Tai-wen Kun, Great Lord of the Court, and established the regency.

Not without casualties, however. The Kim family had been most in favor for some decades, but the Min clan had been powerful for centuries. They were, in fact, the second family in the land. Even, they had an older background and claimed greater nobility than the royal house of Yi. They were largely Chinese in blood and origin and certainly maintained the best of connections in Peking. And since it was China—claiming suzerainty over Cho-sen whenever it suited her convenience—who would send special envoys to invest the new monarch, it was a blow to Ni Kung when the Min clan withdrew from court in high dudgeon and were not to be cajoled or intimidated.

But Ni Kung had ingenuity. He patched up the quarrel by a betrothal of his young son to a princess of the Min clan. This did not seem risky at the time, for was not the King his son, and did not all the laws and customs of the land demand obedience of son to father? Besides, the boy was a weak-willed lad.

However, this act put many Mins in positions of power once more, and their retainers soon accounted for much of the population of Seoul.

"AND while this did not matter much while the Tai-wen Kun held the regency," went on Viscount Miura at the trial in Hiroshima, "it became a factor against our interests when the Queen and certain members of her clan, notably the Queen's brother, Min Yeung Ho, and the Dowager Queen Cho, by a brazen *coup d'état* deposed the Regent and his cabinet and set up the King in his own rights soon after he became of age, establishing a new cabinet dominated by the Mins."

"Be specific," ordered the court. "The evil Queen had worked her vile influence upon the King and controlled him absolutely. She was exceedingly wily and crafty, and the fact was incontestable that the Queen's wish was the King's will. This vile woman must have had witch's brew for blood. The King, instead of giving ear to his noble father's counsel, seemed under the Queen's spell from the earliest years of his marriage."

THERE was good reason. In Cho-sen, marriages were arranged without consulting the wishes of the principals, and bride and groom never saw each other until the wedding. Naturally, this did not make for felicity in married life. In fact, love in the Land of Morning Calm was rare rather than otherwise. Marriage and children were something that happened in the course of living.



"The Queen—where is the Queen?"

*sight for the curious

**roughly, king

But the marriage arranged by the Tai-wen Kun for his personal convenience, to further his own political ends, was different.

For the young King and Queen proved particularly well suited each to the other and fell hopelessly in love.

The first hint the young King had of the jewel given him to wife was when she signed the *hon-se-chi* with as graceful a hand as he did. Women of Korea at that time were not considered worthy of education. Most of them had to sign the wedding document by tracing the outline of wrist, palm and fingers.

The second intimation came a few days after the wedding. As yet she'd spoken little. A bride, for one thing, was forever disgraced if she uttered so much as a sound until the long rites were over, and these extended even into their private lives. Not yet sure of her husband, she'd merely carried the submissive silence a little farther.

The royal pair—the King was fourteen, the Queen but two years older!—were enjoying the beauties of nature, as all Koreans loved to do, in a hidden nook of one of the palace parks.

"Speak to me," ordered the King on an impulse.

"What shall I say?" the Queen asked, with downcast eyes.

"It does not matter, just talk." Then, as she still hesitated: "I shall close my eyes and you will tell me what you see all about us. I like your voice."

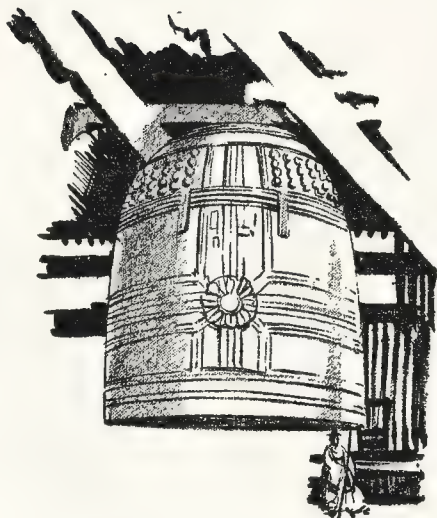
She began to talk, unevenly at first but gaining confidence, and after exhausting the possibilities of the trees and flowers about them raised her eyes to the sky. A cloud reminded her of a tiger, which reminded her of a legend, and she launched off in the realm of fancy. Then she discovered the King's eyes were not closed. They were open, on her, and they were wide. She stopped in confusion.

"How now!" exclaimed the King. "I have seen an apricot-blossom in the snow.* Today I find you beautiful. Yesterday you were not so beautiful. The palace women are not beautiful."

NOW, the truth is, the Queen was not actually beautiful. In fact, she was rather plain—with her face in repose. She was slight and pale, with somewhat sharp features, but with brilliant piercing eyes in which the veriest fool could read intellect and character and compassion.

Yet when she engaged in conversation there was a transformation. Then vivacity rose to the surface, and naïveté and wit, and her features brightened into a wonderful charm that was more than physical beauty. The King's compliment threw her into further confusion and she lowered her eyes again.

*Korean proverb: "I have seen a miracle."



Women had brought their ornaments to go into that bell, and one had cast her child into the fused metal as a sacrifice.

"Alas, my lord," she murmured. "Women in our country have not had a favored rôle. Their lives do not lead to beauty."

"How now! What do you mean by that?"

"My lord knows that palace life is too public for women of the noble clans. They would find it vulgar and intolerable; therefore the palace women come from lower classes, whose lives have been harsh and hard and leave their stamp one generation upon another."

WELL the King knew this in his heart. He had been born in poverty himself in a small village, and had played in the streets with the children of the village and flown kites with them until his father had yanked him off to the capital, a pawn in the greater game. He knew the status of women in his country. But this was all according to ancient custom and he had never given it a thought.

"You would say that our women are mistreated?" And he frowned.

"Alas, my lord, men are gods, women are slaves, lower than the beasts of burden. They have no rights, my lord, even they have no names outside their own households! Yet they work in the fields to provide a living for the family. Here the men help if they choose—or sit in the shade and smoke. The women keep the house and provide the meals and comfort; they bear the children who are the mainstay of old age. But they have eyes and ears and tongues and feelings, my lord, just as do the men. Why then should they have such different treatment?"

"Woman's life is prescribed by law," argued the King. "She has protection and she has respect."

The Queen sighed and fell silent. There is no doubt she had been well

tutored by the wisest in her family (though possibly not on this score!) but even without counsel her intuition would have told her she might learn to lead the King but not to drive him. There was time to spare. It would be several years before the King came to power. She could wait. But while waiting she branched out more and more to paint the larger canvas—on her own, frequently quite in excess of Min clan advice—for she found the King receptive in heart as well as mind.

DURING the years of the regency the young King had little responsibility. He had, however, one daily duty at dusk.

The great street of Chong No cleft the city of Seoul in two. Another major artery crossed Chong No, and at this intersection, under a gracefully curved roof, hung the great bronze bell of Chong No, said to be third largest in all the world.

Its tone was a deep booming roar, sweet and solemn, that could be heard all over the city and well into the surrounding mountains. It had a faint wailing overtone. Women had brought their gold and silver ornaments to go into that bell, and one had cast her child into the fused metal as a propitiatory sacrifice. That wailing overtone was the voice of the child—so said legend.

An elaborate ceremony attended the closing of the city's eight gates each night. As daylight waned, four beacons were lighted on the south mountain within the walls, one for each point of the compass. These published the fact that all was well within his majesty's domains. Four officials thereupon presented themselves at the palace and with low obeisance announced to the King that all was well in the north, in the south, the east, the west. At this the palace band struck up gay airs which in turn gave the signal for the tolling of the great bell of Chong No. Then were the gates swung to and barred.

A few hours after the closing of the gates, the bell of Chong No spoke again each night to herd the men indoors and turn over the streets to the women—part of the protection and respect the King had mentioned as being accorded to women, for in these hours a man caught abroad was subject to dire punishment. The bell was next heard at dawn when it tolled the opening of the gates.

These hours of curfew were the King's favorite time of all the day. Indeed, the softer hours of night well matched his amiable disposition, for he was not the most worldly of men. By nature gentle, kind and thoughtful, too much so for a King and for his own good, it was these traits that led his own father to suppose he could rule the King.

This does not mean, however, that the young King did not enjoy the fuss and pomp and royal prerogatives that were now his. In Cho-sen everyone and everything existed for the King. But under the Queen's able guidance he came to know that there could be two sides to a question, and that the pleasanter side was not always the right one.

It was on a summer night early in their married life when the Queen dealt to the influence of the Tai-wen Kun over his son the most telling blow of all their years together.

Dusk had fallen, the gates were shut, and the King had retired with the Queen to a summer pleasure-house which stood in the middle of a lotus pond. They were alone—or practically so. The King had ordered screens placed for himself and the Queen, and the eunuchs and court women in attendance had withdrawn a short distance. Silken lanterns like little moons swayed in the breeze that also stirred to soft music the myriad small brass bells suspended from the eaves.

The Queen was lovely tonight. She wore a yellow silk *chogerie*, or jacket waist, like those worn by all Korean women, fastened with an amber button; under this a very long flowing blue skirt. Her garments were always of exquisitely dainty silk.

Like other Korean ladies of birth, she dressed her hair parted in the center, drawn tightly and smoothly away from her face, and knotted rather low at the back of her head—quite in contrast to the quantities of false hair piled high on the heads of the powdered and perfumed and penciled ladies of the court. Through this knot were thrust two long ornamental hairpins of gold filigree, one set with coral, the other with pearls. The Queen was not fond of jewelry and seldom wore more than this—save, according to custom, a number of filigree gold ornaments decorated with long silken tassels suspended at her waist.

So they sat as the bell of Chong No tolled curfew. The King had been silent for some minutes. At the three strokes of the bell he sighed and stirred.

"How singularly beautiful, the voice of the bell," he murmured.

HERE the Queen saw a chance she had been waiting for.

"The voice of the people," she said, and paused.

"The people?"

"Can you not hear it? The deep booming roar of the people offering prayer for your safety. But that returning overtone—their complaint of abuse, their plea for understanding and kindness."

The King had become used to this approach. It usually heralded a mi-

nor lecture. He sighed again—another kind of sigh.

"What now?" he asked.

"Alas, your children are overladen with abuse to the point they cannot rise under it."

"How now?"

"In the office of Regent, the Tai-wen Kun, our honorable father, is a veritable *kal-pem*.* He gives to this country ten thousand sorrows.** The people are being bled unmercifully."

"Can we not talk," the King asked testily, "without mention of my father?"

"One instance only. The Tai-wen Kun built himself a new palace."

"Yes, that is so."

"At the expense of the people."

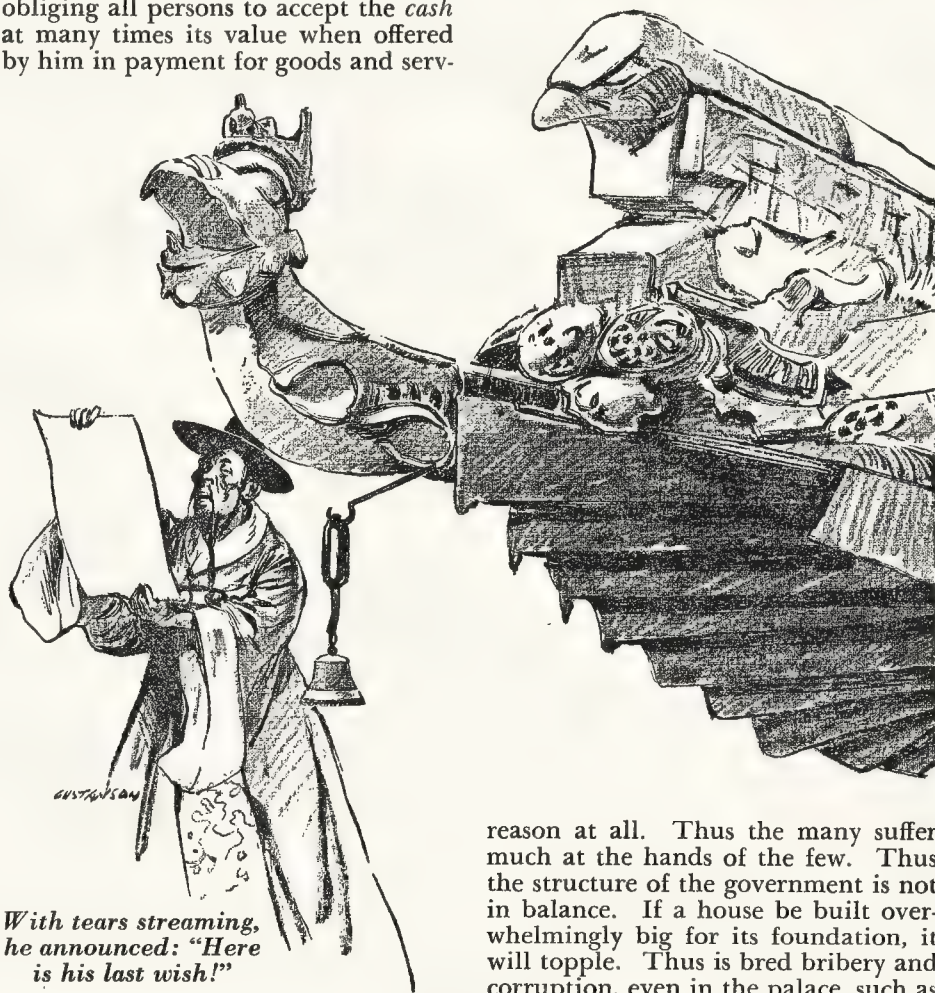
"How?"

"He put forth an imperial edict obliging all persons to accept the *cash* at many times its value when offered by him in payment for goods and serv-

"But the people suffered."

"It is necessary that the people support the government," said the King indulgently.

"In its legitimate needs, indeed. But they do more. They support not only the officials, but the officials' retainers in untold numbers, and their retainers. Alas, Seoul is not called the 'city of three thousand officials' for nothing. The people are taxed and taxed. The magistrates in whose hands is the collection of taxes must earn as much as they send to the treasury to support their own establishments. Their collectors must earn half as much. It is even so, the people are taxed beyond the incentive to raise and produce, for the magistrate is both judge and jury and can seize anything they possess which might catch his eye, and for no



With tears streaming, he announced: "Here is his last wish!"

ices. He commandeered architects and artisans and materials. They had no choice. Could they object or demur? Had they even been slow to accept the great honor, they could have been put to the most horrible torture or perhaps death."

"The Tai-wen Kun is my father."

"The people are your children."

"When the palace was completed he advanced the *cash* to its former value."

*Tiger in full vigor, ferocious

**Korean proverb: "Much grief."

reason at all. Thus the many suffer much at the hands of the few. Thus the structure of the government is not in balance. If a house be built overwhelmingly big for its foundation, it will topple. Thus is bred bribery and corruption, even in the palace, such as to measure the loyalty of our very servants by the depth and breadth of their pockets."

"Have done," said the *Hap-mun*, in a humor now. "We have the *Chibang Cheido*" (the Book of Laws) "and the *Chaipan Chang Chung*" (the Book of Rules for Courts of Justice). "You have spoiled the evening."

"As my lord desires," answered the Queen in a distant voice.

Yet she had accomplished her purpose. Never afterward did the King hear the great bell of Chong No, as he did each night, without hearing



Once she had escaped . . . but her luck had played out at last.

ever louder and louder that faint wailing overtone, the voice of the child appealing to justice. Inevitably it made him a more prudent man in the use of the royal prerogatives.

Not that he became a crusader. Not even the Queen hoped for any sweeping changes overnight. The overwhelming combination of nobles—her own clan included—who would be the ones to suffer by reform made this impossible. Too many centuries of feudalism dictated a graduated scale of social evolution. As persistently as the bell itself, however, the Queen played upon this theme and kept the King's conscience sharpened.

And in time she thought she saw the answer. The Christian massacre instigated by the foreigner-hating Tai-wen Kun when he was Regent had not stopped the growth of the movement. Other missionaries came and were undoubtedly doing good in Korea. She would enlist their aid.

CAME a night years later when the Queen brought up the most important subject of all—the vexatious question of Korea's isolation. The royal pair were to be entertained by the palace dancers. The King had settled himself and smoothed his long *touramachi*, or coat, of rich red silk, the royal color. The Queen was at his side. There was a brief wait for the pageant to commence.

Said the Queen sadly and abruptly: "Our lovely land is like a frog in a well."

"How now!" said the King.

"Since before the time of the good King Cheng-jong, strangers have found our shores."

"Yes."

"At first they were turned away. Later they came in greater numbers, and some in secret, and they spread the new religion called Jesus or Christian."

"That is quite true."

"These teachings are not bad. Indeed, they correspond in many ways to our own teachings. They speak of kindness and love and compassion. Surely these things will not harm our people."

"No."

"Many of our people have believed and have become Jesus-people or Christians. The Tai-wen Kun does not like this. He hates all foreigners. In the year of our marriage he caused many thousands of our people to be killed for listening, and the strangers to be put to the torture. But these strangers come from countries which are stronger than we are."

"The French learned our strength!" answered the King.

"But the French did not use their strength, and the French are only one people. There are the people called Dutch, and the people from England,

and there is another great country called United States. And we are such a small country, hemmed in between the Tai-kuk and Dai Nippon. China and Japan have used us as a pawn for their quarrels for most of our existence. Do you not wish our country to remain at peace?"

"Of course," said the King testily.

"We can no longer depend upon the protection of China against the awakening power and rapaciousness of Japan. Would it not be wise to treat with the most powerful of these stranger countries, who would have no enduring close demands upon us, but whose friendship would be an influence to make Japan pause in her increasing demands? It is a matter for much thought, indeed."

"Have done, then," he cried. "I will give it some thought." Then more gently: "You mean well, to be sure, and you are wise. Truly it will take much thought. But now the dancers come. Look."

It was true. Cho-sen was in an unenviable position. China and Japan in the Nineteenth Century were being forced from their age-old seclusion by the "barbarous Westerners." More, a few thousand European troops had entered Peking and sacked the summer palace of the emperor. This utter loss of Chinese military prestige had struck terror into all Korean hearts, since for centuries China, the Tai-kuk, the Great Empire, had been in their eyes the very symbol of invincibility.

Too, Japan was stirring restlessly, and not a Korean but remembered through the tales handed down from father to son the horror of the invasion of Hideyoshi. Korea had never risen since. The threat of Japan was a real one to them.

Now these same Westerners were knocking on her doors in increasing numbers. Korea could not hope to escape, whether from the Westerners or her neighbors.

The question was, should she submit with grace and open her ports and land, or should she resist these peoples who were obviously powerful enough to enslave her if they chose?

The Tai-wen Kun was a reactionary on the subject, and even in his retirement he had a substantial following. The Min clan chose to be progressive. And the spokesman for the Min clan was the Queen.

"UNTIL the Queen's voice," (said Viscount Miura, at the Hiroshima trial) "was the only voice! The depths of depravity were reached when she so willfully opposed our plans for Korea. Something had to be done. We did not have forever to wait. The great drouth of thirteen years ago appeared a likely time, for the rice crop failed and the people were hungry.

"At first all went well. The Tai-wen Kun had been approached secretly. The Queen's insane treaty with the United States that spring was further fuel to the hatred he held for her since her *coup* in deposing him from power.

"The palace and the King were seized, but the wily Queen had notice. She changed clothing with a palace maid who somewhat resembled her, and escaped. A water-carrier took her through the guards at the gates, slung over his shoulder and pretending he was one of us and she was his booty.

"Several of the Min family were killed, but two chief ministers of the government, Min Thai Ho and Min Yong Ik, escaped with the Queen. Then the wicked Queen caused a whisper to be circulated that it was the Japanese who were responsible for the rioting, whereupon the mob turned upon our legation and killed some of our nationals. We managed an escape to the coast at great risk.

"The Tai-wen Kun held power for a short time, but he was kidnaped and taken to China by the Chinese Envoy, whereupon the Queen returned to the palace and all was as it had been. We salvaged but one thing at that time—the right to maintain troops in Korea for the protection of our nationals. It was a step. Again three years later—"

THE court interposed sarcastically: "You have given an admirable lesson in history, Viscount Miura, but we do not yet know what happened when you took up your duties as Minister to Korea. Perhaps the Secretary of Legation will be more precise. Kindly give way."

The new witness was identified. Then: "Tell the court the occurrences of early October."

"Count Inouye" (said Fukashi Sugimura, former Secretary of Legation at Seoul) "had left for home the middle of September. Viscount General Miura, a most able man in the circumstances, was in charge. We had many talks and finally decided with utmost despair what must be done.

"Can anyone blame us? For the past year the Queen had been discussing Christianity more and more with the American missionaries. She was becoming more and more friendly with people from western countries, determined to counteract our influence. She had one of the Americans draw plans for a new school for sons of the nobles, promising thirty thousand dollars for the school and as much more for its support annually, and had caused teachers to be sent for from America. And this was but the beginning of her plans!

"We had no choice of action. More and more was the Queen defying us. She must positively be disposed of.



It was Okamoto who found her—a small, trembling woman, attempting to hide.



We should never make progress in Korea until she was dead.

"The Tai-wen Kun was under guard at his country house, in exile from the court. However, we easily managed secret meetings with him. On October third plans were fully made, awaiting only the setting of the day. I myself drew up the series of pledges that bound the Tai-wen Kun to us.

"When a few days later we learned of the Queen's truculent intention to disband the *Kurentai*—"

The Japanese Legation was a small city itself within the walls of Seoul. With its own military officers and police, correspondents from Tokyo and Kobe, servants and spies, what went on within its walls could be as secret as the Minister chose to make it.

The King flared: "Never will I sign such a paper!" One of the officers seized him and swung him about.

Viscount Muira's personal servant announced the Tai-wen Kun. Besides the Minister of Legation, Fukashi Sugimura and Okamoto, second of Miura's two chief assistants, were present. After much polite hissing and bowing and scraping of knees and the usual verbal jockeying, General Miura came to the point.

"We have sent for you because the time has come. The King has delayed overlong his decision on the program of—ah—reforms we presented. In addition, word has reached us that the

Queen is insolently determined to disband the *Kurentai*. We must move at once before this can happen. You have not weakened?"

"I have sworn to be avenged upon the Queen before I die," asserted the Prince Parent. "You hold my pledges."

"Once the King is in our hands we will reestablish the regency at once. Now, the plans agreed upon will be followed. Orders have been given to the Commander of our Legation Troops covering his part. All our police who are off duty will don civilian dress and provide themselves with swords and proceed to the rendezvous. A substantial number of our—ah—nationals have been picked up and will be available. They will meet at the gates of your residence at middle night.

"From there they will proceed to the West Gate where they will meet the *Kurentai* troops. Meanwhile, we shall be making sure of the palace guards. When certain, I will have a man strike the bell of Chong No once. You will then move on to the Kwang-hwa gate of the palace. Order of the march will be, first, the *Kurentai* troops followed by our police with military officers in charge, then your palanquin and a body of picked men.

"Remember, one stroke of the Chong No bell. You will now please excuse us. There is much for us to do yet."

NIGHT was the time for waking in the Kyeng-won palace. Then was all official business transacted—unless the King preferred to give a poetry contest, or judge a new dancer, or select silks or perfumes. He had consulted all night with the Queen and members of the cabinet. Undoubtedly the royal family was in some danger—talk of it in the streets was free enough—since the recall to Japan of Count Inouye, the gentleman diplomat, and the coming of the soldier, Viscount Miura. Miura was a Buddhist of the Zen school, an ascetic to whom nothing mattered but the advancement of Japan.

Peace could be had by approving the program presented by General Miura. But it was an outrageous program in its demands. Peace for now, as against the ultimate welfare of the country. . . . Appeasement. But if these demands were met, would there not be others later? Where would they stop?

Round and round the argument had gone and again they were back at the beginning. The Queen retired. The cabinet retired. The King was left alone to pace and think fretfully. He was inclined to capitulate. He was not a fighter. But the Queen would not waver, and he could not disregard her advice. Had it ever been evil, in all their years?

And as he paced, the great bell of Chong No struck once. But it was not dawn! It was only—what? Three o'clock! How then was this? Could spirits have struck the bell to stir the King's conscience? The voice of the people! Ah, the Queen was right. Truly he held the kingship as in trust. And truly the welfare of the people was his in the end.

Yes, he must stand firm against the ravenous demands of the Japanese. After all, Korea was not friendless. There was the United States, big, kind, benevolent, just. As he made his decision he felt the load ease magically from his shoulders. The blessed bell of Chong No! He would give its pavilion a new roof of fresh soft-green tiles. He would hang a thousand brass fish from its eaves. He would—

Of course he must tell the Queen of his decision. Before he could go to her, however, a servant broke in upon him and he suddenly became aware of a commotion in the courtyards.

The servant kowtowed frantically.

"My lord, my lord," he babbled. "Fly, fly before it is too late! The Japanese have surrounded the palace and are letting in the *chabin duli*.* They are killing what guards resist. They mean harm—"

There was a sound of shots as the crown prince rushed in, then the minister of the royal household, who said breathlessly, "M. Sabbatin, the Russian, is still in the palace. I have sent for him and for General Dye—"

General Dye was the American who had trained the palace guards. Before the frightened King could collect his wits, the apartment was forced open by Japanese *soshi* and officers, led by Okamoto of the Legation.

Okamoto presented a document to the King brusquely. "Sign this!"

"What—what is it?"

"It will divorce and repudiate the Queen."

The King flared briefly. "Never will I sign such a paper!"

One of the Japanese officers seized him and swung him about. Ye Kiung Chik, Minister of the Household, interposed and was slain with a single stroke of a sword on the spot. The crown prince was seized by his top-knot—a handy grip, that egg-shaped ball of the male's hairdress—and was dragged roughly about the room.

"The Queen—where is the Queen?"

No one would tell. The angry mob broke into the side rooms, calling: "The Queen, the Queen!"

The Queen was about to retire. She had dried her eyes from a spell of weeping over the hopeless situation of her country at the hands of the insatiable Japanese. No concession was ever enough for them.

HER second son, Prince Oui-Wha, rushed in and told her of the trouble, and the sounds outside then reached her. She heard a mob breaking down the palace wall near the royal apartments.

"Come—quickly!" cried the boy. "There is one small gate not guarded. But there is no time to lose!"

"I cannot," said the Queen. "The Dowager Queen is too old to flee. I cannot leave her; she will be frightened to death. Besides, Count Inouye has more than once given me the solemn assurance of his government that the Japanese troops will see no harm comes to me. He did this again on the day he left!"

"You cannot trust to that. Come! Quickly! There is no more than enough time!"

*Toughs, roughs, hoodlums.

There wasn't that much time. On several occasions the Queen had escaped assassination in one form or another, instigated by her arch enemy, the Tai-wen Kun. Once she had escaped such a situation as this by exchanging clothes with a serving-maid. But her luck had played out at last.

It was Okamoto who found her. At the head of a band of *soshi*, the lowest of hoodlums, and Japanese officers, he entered the Queen's detached apartments. There they seized first the terrified palace women, who were beaten and dragged about by their hair.

"Where is the Queen?" he kept demanding, but none would tell.

At last he found a small, trembling woman who was attempting to hide and dragged her into the hallway. One Kunitomo Shigeakira struck the first blow with his sword and was thereafter to boast publicly in the streets of Seoul that he was the murderer. His brother-in-law, Sase Kumatetsu, and Suzuki Junhen, known to low Koreans as "Chokuman" or "Shorty" Suzuki, were with him. There were others, all scum of Japan, professional cut-throats in the pay of the Son of Heaven.

Blow after blow was struck the defenseless woman until she fell to the floor bleeding and unconscious. But the murderers, not yet sure, threw a bedrobe over her and dragged to the spot several of the Queen's women.

"The Queen!" they cried in terror, as the Japanese pulled off the cover.

Satisfied now that their work was done, that they had found the right victim, they carried her, still breathing, to the palace deer park near by, threw her on a pile of brush, and soaked all with kerosene. Then they lighted it. As the flames roared up they piled on more fagots and more, and poured on more kerosene, until nothing was left but ashes and charred bones. . . .

The trial at Hiroshima was quite frank in all details. Nothing was concealed. Yet the judge's summing-up was one of the most remarkable documents ever handed down by a court of justice. It ended:

Notwithstanding these facts, there is no sufficient evidence to prove that any of the accused actually committed the crime originally meditated by them. . . . For these reasons, the accused, each and all, are hereby discharged. . . .

*"Given at Hiroshima local court by
Yoshida Yoshihide,
Judge of Preliminary Inquiry.
Tamura Yoshiharu,
Clerk of the Court."*

THUS perished Queen Min on October 8, 1895. Thus passed the ablest woman in the annals of Korea. . . . Thus embarked Japan upon her era of world conquest with one of the most abominable murders in all history. Precedent was established, the way paved, the curtain rung up.

ARMY FIGHT

The Navy had plenty fight too, for a Service game in wartime is something very special.

by **Joel Reeve**

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

SCOTTY DOYLE had almost forgotten that old reserve commission—but here he was in the Army, and all Broadway was laughing. Scotty, however, just went to camp and sweated through the summer and learned a few things necessary to hold down his lieutenancy, and then the big Army-Navy football game was projected for the benefit of the joint Relief organizations, and here came Scotty back as coach of the Army, big as life and twice as natural.

He grinned around the old haunts with Belle Morgan, and everyone was glad to see him, but nobody thought of him as a soldier. He was just King Scotty, grown too old for the pro game, a slightly battered giant of thirty-two, with a permanent grin and practically no dignity. Belle had to sing at a U.S.O. dance, and Scotty tagged along as usual.

Scotty had been tagging after Belle for ten years now. Even before she made a small hit and began radio work, Scotty had fed her steaks and dragged her where people would see her. Scotty was a big-timer then, Scotty the Scooter, the high scorer, leading ground-gainer and best passer of the Giants. It had been good for the dark, half-scared, half-defiant little girl from Wisconsin to be seen around with Scotty.

Well, that was past. For two years Scotty had been a coach in the minors, his playing days behind him. Part of Broadway, the tender-hearts of the stage and sports crowds, never would forget him; but to the columnists and newspaper reporters he was one-stick copy. "Scotty Doyle, former football great, will help coach the Army team in the great game which will be played for the benefit"—etc.

Cady Smythe was at the U.S.O. dance, and the word was out that Cady was producing a new Porter show. Belle turned on the charm, all dark and splendid and beautiful as a witch. When she hovered at the mikes, Cady was there, listening with all his ears. Belle wanted the lead in that show! Grinning, Scotty wandered away, leaving her to chain Cady, if she could.

Belle was all right, he thought. A little hard, maybe, but who wouldn't

be, bucking Broadway all those years! A bit selfish, perhaps. She would never marry Scotty, because—well, he didn't just know why. They made enough money between them. Maybe because she thought the public wouldn't like it. Belle was strong on what the public liked. Scotty saw Bill Drew, his old playing mate on the Giants. Bill was Navy, and so were the others about the small table, but Scotty drifted over.

There was a girl at the table, and a young man with red hair cut crew fashion, dressed in blue, with the bar and star of the ensign on his sleeve. There was Drew, and Cotton Hewes, great ex-Dodger quarterback, and the Cole brothers, Chuck and Luck, formerly of the mighty Bears. The first-string Navy backfield for the coming big game, thought Scotty. Quite a crew!

The young red-head was talking in a crisp, quick voice: "It's perfectly simple if the defensive end is drawn into the desired blocking position by the feint of an inside run to his side and what appears to be a reverse to the other side. At Princeton I carried, and we did it this way—" He showed them with a pencil on the cloth.

There was also Sloan, the old Eagle tackle, and some collegiate youths from Fordham, Pitt and even Harvard. This youth was telling them . . . Scotty squinted and recognized the red-head. It was Charley Belden—"Red" Belden. It was last year's A.P. All America halfback.

Scotty looked at the girl next. She was starry-eyed with youth and life. She had a short upper lip, and a nose which was a button of delight. She looked at Scotty and said:

"A spy! An Army fifth columnist!"

Bill Drew drawled: "That's no Army man, Miss Cordell. That's just old Scotty Doyle!"

"And anyway," said Cotton Hewes, "Scotty invented that double reverse years and years ago."

Chuck Cole said: "Tell us some more, Red! This is interesting," making himself sound like Meredith Willson.

Belden looked important and said: "Well, the way we are working that

T—" Then he scowled at Scotty and said: "Look, this is pretty private."

The ex-professionals all burst into laughter. Red Belden glared about at them, beginning to be aware that he was getting a short but exhilarating ride. Obscurely, Scotty was sorry for the kid. He said: "These mugs can use some lessons. They'll be back with me in the minors when this war is over. How about dancing with me, Miss Cordell?"

She got up at once, her mouth widening in a happy smile. They went out on the floor and she said: "My name's Jane. I guess Red had his neck away out."

"He's a fine back," said Scotty. "I saw him against Yale last year. He's tough and fast and smart."

"And cocky," said Jane. "I'm supposed to marry him—I ought to know."

"Supposed to?" asked Scotty. "Is there a chance, then?"

They danced around once. She kept looking up at his good-humored broad face with its tiny scars of battle. She said: "I'll tell you this. I wish you'd call me. I like you!"

She was very young, but she was serious. There was an impishness about her, a drollery which tickled Scotty's fancy. He said: "I'll do that, Jane."

Red Belden cut in very soon. He was scowling, and to Scotty his manner was curt. Scotty said, "Take it easy, Navy!" and grinned and went to find Belle.

There was no sign of her. Cady was gone too, so Scotty supposed they were talking contract, or something. He hoped Belle got the lead. It would really make her, he knew.

HE left the dance and went uptown. He found Belle and Cady in Lindy's. Cady left. Belle said: "I saw you dancing with the Cordell girl. She has millions, but she's a spoiled brat—an orphan. . . . I'm almost sure of the part, Scotty. You'd better take me home. I've got to get plenty of sleep. I'm not as young—" she stopped, compressing her lips. "I won't admit it! I can do that part! I know it!"

Scotty said: "Sure, baby."

"Cady is cautious. He won't say yes and he won't say no. He's that kind. But I have a chance, Scotty!" She rattled on. For years Scotty had been listening to her. She never knew what he was doing, never evinced the slightest interest. She missed him when he was not around, fretted and fumed if he did not call her—but he always wondered if he were not the perfect sounding-board for her conversation—and no more.

She said: "I declare, Scotty, if I get this part, I may marry you!"

"How nice!" said Scotty, but she was going right on about the show and how Cady was cagey and would be

please take her home, which he did at once. He kissed her perfunctorily, and she said: "I do love you, Scotty—do you think Cady will give in, or will he take that Garon girl, damn her?"

Scotty went down and took the tunnel over to Jersey where the Army All-stars were training, and thought deeply about things. This Army, to which he still did not seem to belong, gave him lots of time for introspection. He could feel his life slipping away, and he could see nothing ahead. He felt a little lost, and for the first time in his life, a little lonely. . . .

The Army did not have the weight, nor the experienced professional stars. Colonel Miles Standby just did not get it. The Colonel was a red-faced, stiff-backed old fellow, from the days of the flying wedge—almost. He had known Rockne. He knew nothing about modern football.

Scotty said: "We've got to use brains. Lippy Samson is a fine quarterback. He'll do. Tick Regan will do."

The Colonel snapped: "Sampson's a West Pointer! But Regan! A fat little fellow! Doyle, you're in charge, but sometimes I question your judgment. We have big, strong men in the Army—as big as the Navy men. Train them!"

What was the use? Scotty looked over at the toiling Army squads. Tick Regan was the dimensions of a sack of potatoes, but what the Colonel called fat was muscle, hard like iron. Tick was another of the great Bears. Tick was half the ball-club. The other half wasn't much.

Scotty said: "Yes sir."
"We've got to beat the Navy!" roared Colonel Standby. "This is bigger than West Point-Annapolis!" He seemed a little staggered at the idea, but he went on gamely: "There's a war. Is the Army to be held up as lesser than the Navy in the eyes of the country? It is a test, sir!"

Scotty said, "Yes sir," and felt that they were hissing like a couple of Japs. He was very helpless before all this *esprit de corps*. He had been a football tactician for so many years that it was a science to him. He *knew* those Navy pros, Hewes and the Coles and Sloan and Drew. He had seen Belden, and knew how good the red-head could be with blocking.

He went on coaching the teams, carefully in the limited time attempting to get cohesion into their efforts. He had Kid Hobey, an aged Redskin vet, at one tackle to bolster the line. He had two Southern firebrands for his backfield in Keg Dempsey of Tech and Morey Lee of Georgia. He worked patiently to mold them into Tick's hard-hitting style, and he got Lippy Samson straightened out on strategy.

WHEN he got a night off, Belle was out with Cady on a party. So Scotty called Jane Cordell's number and said, "What's cooking; nice girl?"

She said: "Hello, nice guy!"

Scotty said: "I will buy you an ice-cream soda."

"That's for me!" she chortled. "Nobody ever buys me anything but daiquiris and I don't drink them; I just like to look at the color of them."

They sat in a booth at Wargrun's, chatting like old friends. Jane was as cute as a bug, Scotty thought. She was curious, she wanted to know all about Scotty. He had never talked about himself so much, and it made him self-conscious, so he made her unfold a bit. That was when Red Belden found them.

Jane said: "Sit down and have ice-cream, Red!"

He just stood there, staring at Scotty. He was big and wide, and there was that look in his eye. He said: "I wanted to take you to a movie, Jane."

"No movie," she said, waving her spoon. "Act human, will you?"

Red said: "Father and mother are coming for the game. I wanted to make some plans."

"I'd better go," said Scotty. He got up, and for a moment he thought Belden was going to elbow him.

Jane said: "You sit down!" Her eyes had narrowed a little. "Red! You get out!"

Belden stiffened, and Scotty dropped back a step. The youth's fists were doubled and ready. Scotty said, "Why don't you take it easy, Red?" in a very calm voice.

Belden's fists opened. He made a stiff little bow at Jane and said: "I'll call you tomorrow." He went out, his heels clicking angrily on the tiled floor.

Scotty sat down and said: "Whew!"

"Three years!" muttered Jane. "Three years of that! I'm getting mighty sick of it!"

"You don't seem spoiled to me," said Scotty. "Are you spoiled?"



Colonel Standby grew red, but Scotty went on: "Leave my ball-club—what's left of it!"

"Not by him!" she said. "That animated football!"

Scotty winced, and then suddenly realized they hadn't spoken of football all evening. He had talked about himself—but not about the game. That was strange. He looked at the flushed, pretty girl and talked some more. Until midnight they walked around and

heel, but not too much. He did not quite know how he felt.

It occurred to him later that it was just as well he did not have to play against Red Belden in the game. He was too old to take part in such shenanigans.

Colonel Standby was dissatisfied, so he took over. There was nothing for Scotty to do about it except walk the sidelines and curse and worry. The Colonel had a new idea—culled from a high-school coach of the 1900's, Scotty thought.

"Not enough fight!" the Colonel stormed. "I'll fix 'em. They got to fight for their jobs!"

It was silly, and it was dangerous. Lippy Samson took a short pass in the flat and started to run. Tick made no tremendous effort to get him, and Standby screamed: "You're yellow, Regan! You're no Army man!"

Tick turned pale around the mouth. Scotty wanted to run out and implore the old Bear halfback to lay off, but he did not dare. He crossed his fingers and hoped. Lippy took a short plunge on Tick's side of the line.

Tick moved. He was dazzlingly swift when he wanted to be, despite his stocky build. He flew into Lippy. There was a loud concussion. The Colonel whooped with glee.



*Jane's eyes narrowed.
"Red! You get out!"*

ate ice-cream at various places and talked. . . .

He telephoned Belle before he went back.

She said: "I'm so glad you called! Winchell was there, and he came over and said to Cady: 'Did you hear Garon signed a pic contract?' And Cady hadn't heard, and Winchell winked at me. Wasn't that swell of him, as if he was trying to help me get the part! Imagine that Garon getting a movie chance! I just don't understand such things, and she skinny as an eel, and stupid! Did you see a nice movie, Scotty?"

He said, "No. Good-night, darling," and hung up. He felt a little like a

IT was three days before the game, but that did not deter Standby the Fire-eater. He had divided the team for scrimmage. He had even split the backfield, putting Tick and Lee in one outfit and Dempsey and Lippy opposing them. He had put half the first team line on the second team, and filled in with some beefeaters of his own choice. Scotty cursed the army ranking system steadily, watching.

Standby was whipping them up, howling at them. The boys began to get their blood up, and started working out on each other a little. Kid Hobe tossed one of the big boys about twenty yards and got a roar of approval from the Colonel.

Scotty ran out then. Lippy was lying on the ground, very still. The doctor ran out too. Then the stretcher-bearers came. A rib was gone. Tick was saying:

"I'm sorry, Scotty. I'm a dope. I'm sorry as hell!"

Colonel Standby blustered: "Can't take it! Got to have men who can stand abuse against that Navy!"

Scotty straightened. He forgot about rank. He forgot about everything but poor Lippy and the game of football against the Navy. His voice was hard and cutting. "That kid could take plenty! And he was the only decent quarterback we've got! You deliberately roused Tick into letting loose, and now you've got as much chance to win as a tissue-paper cat running through the hell you certainly are destined to see some day."

Colonel Standby grew red. Scotty went on: "Go ahead! Exploit your damned rank. You belong on a football field just as much as I belong in

this Army that allows you to interfere! Go bust yourself and leave my ball-club alone—what's left of it!"

Standby gave all the signs of a man about to have a fit. He glared at the football squad. He saw the complete agreement with Scotty on their faces, blinked once. Then he straightened his shoulders and said in trembling accents: "I'll see you after practice, Doyle. Take over, here!"

He walked away, his head up, toward the clubhouse. Tick said: "Cheese, Scotty! They'll shoot you against a wall!"

"Play football!" snarled Scotty. "Get back where you belong and walk through plays. You'll never get that 64 right if you don't practice. Here! I'll take Lippy's place for this. No tackling—walk through."

He moved in, still raging mad. He handled the ball smoothly, in his old way. Tick moved like a cog in a very delicate machine, going through perfectly every maneuver. Keg Dempsey never missed a cue. Morey Lee suddenly seemed to get very smart, where before he had been a little slow.

Scotty got up a sweat. He worked faster and harder. The team began to click. Every man carried out his assignment with aplomb, lashed by Scotty's commanding voice.

He stopped at last. Tick said: "Gee! What a workout! Scotty!"

THE ten who would be starters against Navy crowded around. They were, after all, a swell bunch—they had worked like nailers, knowing that they were the underdogs. Scotty stared back at them. He said: "I'm out of shape. I'm thirty-two."

"Sure," said Tick harshly. "We can't ask him!"

Morey Lee said wistfully: "When he handles that ball, I sho' feel good! Like papa's takin' cha'ge."

Kid Hobey didn't say anything. The Kid was about twenty-nine. They all just stood around and looked down at their big feet.

Scotty muttered: "Well, I never really been out of shape."

They seemed to be holding their breaths. Scotty grinned suddenly, like a rainbow after a shower. He said: "I'll do it!"

They didn't holler. They just crowded even closer and patted his back. Three days they had, to get into it with Scotty. They were overwhelming underdogs going in, and they knew it. But they were quite serene now. . . .

The Colonel was next. He stood, straddle-legged and started to give Scotty a lecture on discipline. Scotty said smoothly: "I apologize, Colonel. And I've decided to play quarterback myself."

The Colonel started. He had a very keen eye, Scotty noted for the first

time. It went up and down Scotty's bulk. Standby said: "But man, you're too old!"

"I'm playing, sir," Scotty repeated.

"But they'll kill you!" exclaimed Standby. He walked up and down. "Your attitude—I don't understand this, Doyle. You cannot make up for your impertinence this way—" He stopped, looked again at Scotty. "No. I see it's not that. You just don't give a damn!"

Scotty was silent. The Colonel hemmed and hawed some more. Then he said, "I'll be in New York until the game. Take over and run things, Lieutenant. I'll be with you at the game."

Under his breath Scotty said, "I was afraid of that!" but he still maintained his silence.

The night before the game, in Wargrun's drug store, Jane slipped into the booth clad in the final triumph of man over small animals, a mink wrap, and a white evening dress which did wonderful things to her figure.

Scotty said: "That's not all for me! Where you going?"

The wrap fell away from rounded shoulders, and Jane said: "I've been. To dinner with Red's parents. And they love me. I'm practically a Belden."

Scotty said: "No!"

"My arthritic uncle, who hates everyone, even me, has given written consent. It's all settled." She ordered a Wargrun Special, everything but the dill pickles.

Scotty said: "Vanilla and chocolate cream. . . . I had an idea you might skip the Belden and marry me some day when you grew up."

Jane sat and looked at him, almost as though she were frightened. Her moist lips parted, and her eyes were filled with unshed tears. She said: "Now wait, Scotty. Fun is fun."

"I'm not kidding," he said.

Jane burst into speech. "You've only known me a few weeks! We've been out just six times—no, this makes the seventh. Oh, Scotty, what am I saying—feeling? How is a girl to know it happens like this?"

The ice cream melted on the plates while they held hands, their eyes bright and fast upon each other. Jane said: "Scotty! A cab! Let's take a ride—and be alone."

In the cozy taxi she seemed still half-frightened, but she melted into his arms, clutching at him. Scotty took a deep breath and sank into the boiling caldron of happiness.

Things began to have a meaning for him in that time, while they rode through the streets. There stretched before him a life he could live. He said: "I've got a little furlough after the game. We won't have much time. I've got a small bank account. We can spend that on the honeymoon."

"I've got more money—" She paused and kissed him. "Forget that. We'll do what you say. I want to do whatever you say, because you're kind to me, and you talk to me as if I'm a human being."

"There won't be any fuss or panoply," said Scotty. "Not time enough."

"No," she said happily. "Just you and me and no furor!"

He thought about Belle then, and Jane must have remembered Red Belden. Another cab passed them, at any rate, and there was Red, staring right in, not missing a detail of their mutual embrace.

BELLE said: "Who? Belden? Do I know you?" She had been awake, reading the part in the show. It had not been given her, but she had the book, and it would do no harm to be letter-perfect if her chance came. . . . The voice on the other end was excited, insistent. She said: "Scotty necking a girl? Your girl? . . . What of it? . . . Aren't you being ridiculous, Mr. Belden?"

The voice was pleading with her. "My parents are here, I tell you! They expect me to marry her! Why, I had her to every house-party for three years. And Commencement! Do you know what that means? That Doyle is after her money, I tell you."

Belle said, "You sound like a damned fool to me," but her heart did a little nip-up. She had neglected Scotty while she worked to get this part. She said: "What can I do?"

"I'll give you my seat at the game," said the voice. "You can sit beside her. My father and mother can sit somewhere else. I'll do it—get other tickets for them. They have come a long way to see me play. I'll take care of Doyle! He's going to play against us! I'll fix him, the old—old has-been."

Belle said: "You think he's serious about the girl, do you? I think you're funny."

There was a moment's silence. Then Belden said almost tearfully: "I just called her, and she admitted they were engaged!"

"A silly trick to make you jealous," said Belle. She was remembering the slim young girl, and how Scotty had danced with her. She said: "But I'll take the ticket and talk with her. Scotty will be panicked to see us together."

She hung up. Scotty and the Cordell kid! What a joke! Scotty was feeling deserted, and playing around. Why—she had always owned Scotty. He had been hers for a decade. It was ridiculous, asinine, preposterous. . . . Scotty had made Belle Morgan, practically, with his kindness and tact and faithfulness. He had kept the messy part of Broadway from touching her at all. He was her anchor.

Colonel Standby had a couple of generals with him in the dressing-room, and maybe that was why he said little about "Sink the Navy gray." Nobody paid any attention to him, anyway. The men were all looking to Scotty. He said:

"You're all good guys. I got no business out there without a rule-book in my pocket and a sponge in my hand to wash you off and give advice. I'm a coach, not a player. But I'll tell you one thing. I'll stick as long as you do!"

They rumbled deep in their throats at him. In the pads, he was wider than ever. His legs were like young trees, even if some of the sap was gone from them. He had football hands, big and deft, patting them as they passed him in the doorway, saying a word to each. He sighed and followed them onto the field.

It was a great occasion, and even the Marines had sent a band, and a small cannon to bark the score. Scotty sent Tick out as captain, and was aware of the glower of Red Belden from the Navy crowd. He felt a twinge of conscience, but knew that he was right, that Jane was right. It was something to make even the beating he was about to take a sort of pleasure.

Navy lost, and Tick decided to receive. Scotty said: "Here we go, and watch that Belden. I think he is hot today!"

Tick said disparagingly: "That college boy? Watch Cotton and the Coles bandits!"

Navy kicked. Tick got the ball and started back. The Army blockers did well, and Tick got to the thirty. Then Belden came from nowhere, and Tick was mowed down by a one-man blitz.

Scotty picked up the former Bear star and said: "Well?"

Tick blinked, unhurt but shaken.

Scotty rallied the Army and gave them a single wing reverse to the weak side, and slid off to put on a block. He ran into Belden. The red-head hit him like a ton of cement, and a fist found Scotty's ribs. Tick got five yards, however.

Scotty went back with the glare of the Belden youth burning him and a pain in his middle. This would not be good, he thought. He called for a pass.

He threw it perfectly, leading Tick a step. Belden seemed to leap out of a hole in the ground. The ball never reached Tick. Red had it, and was coming back.

Scotty edged over, estimating the hurried Navy blocking. He found a way through. He went from the side and fell upon Belden with the lateral, professional collar. Belden's ripping elbow tore at his face, cutting his cheek. Scotty did a flip and slammed Red to the ground, pinning him. He said coolly:

"Take it easy, Navy. You'll get hurt."

"I'll kill you before it's over," whispered Red fiercely.

"Whew!" whistled Scotty. "Like that, huh?"

Then the Navy began. Cotton Hewes faked and gave it to Belden. The red-head was the Navy sleeper, all right. Behind the stupendous blocking of the Cole brothers, he zigged and he zagged and he cut through the Army line like a knife through a cheese.

Down on the five, Scotty had a whirl at him again. He got hands on the writhing hips, but Belden fought over the goal-line for the score. The red-head was on fire.

They kicked the point, too, and before the half was over, Belden had scored again. The Navy attack was so fully sustained at all times that Scotty had not dared use a sub in his line-up until, five minutes before the end of the period, he took his whole starting eleven to the clubhouse for a much-needed few moments of rest.

They flopped about on benches, on piles of blankets, on the floor. They looked at Scotty and said nothing. He began telling them what was happening to them, and why. A trainer mopped his cuts and abrasions, but he did not stop talking.



Belle said: "Scotty neck-ing a girl? I think you're funny."

Colonel Standby tried to get in, but the door was locked. Scotty went on and on, patient, explaining. They listened as though they were about to take off to invade Japan. They had been a scrubby bunch from the beginning, and through the first half they had acted like one. Scotty finished:

"They have us fourteen to nothing. We can't win, but we can hold that down. That's all I ask. Don't let them rout us!"

Then the time was almost up, and the Colonel broke through. He glared at them like a moving-picture college coach, but all he said was: "I'm proud of you! Navy's got the beef and brawn, but you're taking it like men. You're the Army, d'you hear! Nobody's ashamed of you!"

Scotty could have kissed the choleric Colonel. Instead, he managed to get a bit of "lay-down-and-rest" which the trainer ungrammatically but earnestly had been pleading for. He was very tired. He was bruised, and Red Belden was rubbing it in.

BELLE said: "You know a lot about football, Jane."

"I ought to," said Jane. "Red dragged me to games when I was dying of pneumonia! Scotty shouldn't be playing out there. He's not too old—he's just out of strict condition."

Belle said: "You're crazy about him, aren't you?"

Jane turned, and Belle remembered that it was the girl's own father who had made the Cordell money.

"Aren't you?" Jane said sharply.

Belle looked down at the field. The last quarter was beginning. The tattered Army starting eleven was in there, outmanned but battling on all fronts. The score was still fourteen to nothing.

"He did a lot for me. We were going to be married," Belle said.

"You think he didn't tell me that?" demanded Jane. "I know all about you. I even know the places you've worked, the way you've struggled. But you wouldn't marry him, would you?"

"I wanted success," said Belle, half to herself. Scotty seemed very large, down there, rallying his team. They had possession now, on their own twenty-five-yard line. The big black-board said it was Down 1. "I wanted it so hard! Scotty was always there to save off the wolves—"

Jane said: "There he goes! Oh, there he goes!"

Scotty was apparently not doing much. He had called the short punt and was drifting toward the left sideline with the ball in his two hands. But Jane had seen enough football to detect Tick Regan in the flat, with no one near.

Scotty threw it gently, seemingly without aim. The ball quivered

through the air. Belden was sprinting, but there was some spring gone from Red's legs too. Only Tick seemed tough as ever. He reached with one hand, topped the ball, caught it, ran.

The Cole brothers came up, but Tick split them, and then Cotton had his chance, but Tick ran over the smaller Cotton like a runaway six-by-ten, and then the Army had its score. Jane babbled and wept and laughed by turn. Belle sat very still in the cold November air, and wondered why people shouted over football. She said:

"Red Belden is really hurt about you and Scotty carrying on like a couple of high-school kids. Don't you owe him something?"

But Jane was not paying attention. She was rigid, watching the Navy block the kick. She sank into raging sadness. Navy received and started back with its power, with Red Belden spinning and charging into the Army line. Jane wondered how Scotty felt, how his poor muscles were standing it all. He had moved up and was backing the line, sending Morey Lee into the safety position. There was blood on Scotty's face. . . .

There were three minutes to play. Tick said: "We can do it again."

Scotty was numb, so that the pain only came in small waves. He was one large bruise from neck to ankles. He said hoarsely: "Right!"

From the single wing, Tick plunged through. Morey ran beckoning to the left. The ends ran down and screamed. Scotty threw it fast, like a baseball, blindly, for the spot. Belden was around there, but Tick was the man.

The squat man leaped and accepted the bullet pass with one hand. Scotty muttered: "Shades of Tiny Hewitt, let him run!" The ends turned to blockers. Tick ran. Morey hit Belden and almost killed him.

Well, Belden had almost murdered Scotty. The red-head had not missed an opportunity. He was all joints, Scotty thought ruefully—all knees and elbows, and ready to put one in a man's anatomy quicker than a rabbit. Belden was having youth's day. . . .

The Army stands leaped, and Scotty knew that Tick had managed it. He was almost too tired to go down and try to kick the point which would not tie the score, but would give Army a glorious defeat. He staggered a little, trotted to keep his balance.

The line held, and Scotty kicked the point, and it was 14 to 13, which was not bad with a team which did not figure to score at all. They had only to hold the Navy for two minutes. That should be easy. Scotty drowsily thought he could safely insert the third-string quarterback and go to the showers. He walked back down the field, and Morey clapped him on the

shoulder and almost knocked him down.

"We'll take it away from them! We'll get 'em yet!"

Scotty blinked. Tick's face was drawn with fatigue, but his jaw was knotted. Keg Dempsey was rubbing his hands up and down his pants, dancing as if he had not played fifty minutes of tough football. The line was stretching its collective muscles.

It was the old college try. Kicking off to the leaders with two minutes to play, and hoping to win, by Ralph Henry Barbour, God bless him! Scotty's brain turned over once; the fog dropped from his eyes. They were all staring at him.

He said: "The Army never retreats! Get it down there, kid!"

He danced with the others, forcing his legs to move. He had not felt like this since college. He had forgotten how it went. It came back to him, bit by bit. His team was facing defeat and r'aring to go. It was gosh-awful silly, but he would have poked anyone who said so, right on the nose.

Hobey's kick went nice and deep, and the Army ends flashed down; the Navy came up, Belden carrying. Morey stripped two blockers in a dying save and Tick hit Belden and drove him out of bounds on the twenty.

Cotton knew what to do. Just hit the line a couple of times, and the ball-game was over. He gave it to Belden on a straight buck. The embattled Army guards hurled Red for a yard loss.

Cotton grinned. Red stood up and sneered at Scotty. Cotton deliberately called the signal, and the Navy shifted right.

Scotty went up quick. He hauled out the guard. He set himself into the Army line, head up, eyes upon the Navy backs. Again Belden took it. Scotty shouted: "Come get it, you young squirt!"

Belden's eyes flashed, and he came. He put down his head and drove at Scotty as though he would blast him apart.

Scotty did some footwork. He hit on the angle, lifting with his broad shoulders, transferring the shock to Belden. For the first time he used his own hands. He tapped the ball.

Belden was stopped, driven to a standing halt. The ball described a little loop in the air. King Scotty, the all-time All-America ball-hawk, was waiting. He accepted the small gift of inflated calfskin and ran.

IT seemed he did not run very fast. He was no longer a swift man, no longer Scotty the Scooter. But men melted from before him. There was Tick Regan interposing his iron shoulder, his potato-sack bulk. There was Morey Lee, flashing like a scimitar



from behind, passing Scotty to kill off Navy men in blue. There was Keg, running low and hard, and finally, chasing, was Red Belden.

Scotty went on. He could not make another step, but he did not pause. He lifted his left foot, his right, like any rookie in the awkward squad. He felt Belden coming behind him. He came to pay dirt, and knew he must swerve to avoid the straining red-head. He cross-stepped valiantly.

His left foot skidded. He stumbled, and a lithe young body slammed into him. He saw the last fat white line, like a tantalizing mirage. He made a superhuman effort to reach it, but strong young arms hamstrung his tired legs.

He lay still, hearing the long Army cheer. He propped himself on one elbow, and young Belden was staring at him, his eyes round and full of mingled emotions. A gun went off, and the Army cheers stopped as if blanketed, turned to hollow groans.

Scotty said: "Well, that did it. You win, Navy!"

Red shook his head as if to clear away the cobwebs. His voice was weak but steady. He said: "Scotty. . . . Scotty, you are the—damnedest man who ever. . . . played—this—game." Then he flopped over and spread out, cold as a haddock.

Tick, doleful but proud, said: "You killed him, but he got you! The damned Navy win—but we never quit, did we, Scotty? We never even slowed down!"

The crowd was spending its energy upon getting out of the park. Belle and Jane sat, each waiting for the other to speak. Finally Belle gave in. "Where are you meeting him?"

"At the door of the dressing-room," said Jane defiantly.

"I always made him come downtown," said Belle. "He always ran after me and waited on me. He must have been tired, sometimes—although he never seemed tired, the big monkey. . . . You know what?"

"What?" asked Jane.

"I got a part in a Porter show. This morning. It means—everything to me. We start rehearsing in Hartford tomorrow."

Jane said, "Hartford?"

Belle stood up, touched the sleekness of Jane's furs. "Silver fox! I'll be buying my own, now. Jane—I'd just keep him running. I'm used to him. Maybe I love him—but today I had to make a choice. I'm going to Hartford this evening."

"I do love him," Jane said numbly.

Belle said: "Yes. You're good for him. . . . Remember one thing, will you? I didn't try to get him back."

She was gone, descending the steps, hurrying into the ramp. Jane stared after her one moment, then ran blindly toward the clubhouse, lest she be late and keep Scotty waiting.

THE Colonel and the Generals were all trying to talk at once, but the Colonel won, because he was the loudest. He trumpeted: "Best game the Army ever lost! Best gang ever fought a losing battle!"

Scotty just sat and looked at his worn, gallant guys. After a while, when there was quiet, he said: "I'm gettin' married tomorrow. But when my leave is up—I'll be proud to get back to the Army. I guess I've been swingin' the lead. But you taught me plenty today." He saluted the beaming Colonel. He said, "Yes, sir! I learned about Army fight today. Now I'm a soldier!"

ENTER:

Last month we printed the last story of Tiny David and the State Police. Herewith we reprint the first one, from an issue of a dozen years ago.

WELL, Sleeping-sickness, it may be this is your chance to be famous!"

Corporal Edward David, mounted upon his black horse Bootlegger, tossed this bantering remark to Trooper Henry Linton as the two men, both clad in the uniform of the Black Horse Troop of the New York State Police, rode slowly along between Pleasantville and Tranquil Lake.

"Me?" demanded Trooper Linton. "Not a chance, Delirious. The old man decided long ago I wasn't dumb enough to make a good corporal." He stroked one ear of Booze, his own mount. "What's it all about, anyway? Or isn't a mere trooper supposed to know?"

"I don't know myself, exactly," the Corporal admitted. "Maybe suicide and murder; or maybe just murder. Maybe an inside job, or an outside job. I don't know. Anyway, three persons are dead. The D. A. is puzzled. Said he didn't have time to give his thoughts—if any—to the old man over the telephone."

The two men rode on in silence. They were in the outskirts of Tranquil Lake when Trooper Linton spoke.

"Ever meet the police force here?"

"No, Linny."

Trooper Linton whistled.

"You may have been to France, Useless, and they may have pinned a medal on you—but you haven't done any traveling, and you can never be classed as cultured, until you've met Tranquil Lake's police force! Its name is Chief McCormick—Chief Edward McCormick."

Corporal David waved to a pedestrian, then turned to his companion. "All right, Educated. Ever met the D. A.?"

Trooper Linton shook his head.

"Infant," declared the Corporal, "you aint seen nothin' yet, if you don't know District Attorney Jerome Sellers of Wilson County. . . . Whoa, there!"

He pulled Bootlegger to a halt before a typical country store. Upon the porch was an aged man clad in overalls. His long hair was matted, his eyes watery, and his gaze unsteady. The trembling fingers of his right hand clasped a knife. In the other hand was a stick upon which he had been whittling.

"Good morning," said Corporal David.

Trooper Linton, who had checked his horse, grinned broadly.

"Morning," said the man on the porch.

"Is this the right way to Tranquil Lake?" asked the Corporal.

"It be," replied the old man.

Corporal David leaned down from Bootlegger, his tone and manner confidential.

"I'm Corporal David of the State Police."

"I be John Small," said the old man. His eyes became glassy. "Most everybody in Tranquil Lake knows old John Small." He laughed. "Reckon I be a thousand years old."

"Easily," agreed the Corporal. "Live around here?"

"I live in a shack up on the hill," came the ancient's answer. "I never sleep."

"Quite so," agreed Corporal David. "He might well follow your example." He jerked a thumb toward his companion. "He's always asleep. Well, so long, old John Small."

They rode on, through the main street of the village.

"Didn't know you had any relatives here," said Trooper Linton. "How are the rest of your family?"

CORPORAL DAVID placed his hands upon his broad hips. Bootlegger, despite the absence of guidance from the reins, continued to pick his way through the traffic.

The Corporal spoke in a low voice.

"Linny, there are times when your name should be Ninny. There are three dead men here, and it isn't known who killed them. Three isn't a murder; it's a wholesale killing! For the next day or two you and I are going to be clubby with every half-wit in this section. We are going to start with you—and then proceed to eliminate the other half-wits."

He clucked a command to Bootlegger.

"Now then," he ordered, "wrap up all your comedy and put it in your saddlebag until we get this cleared up! We are going to work, Trooper Linton."

Their first stop was at the town hall, which housed the police station. Here Corporal David met the police force, in person of Chief McCormick; from him the troopers learned the problem confronting them.

TINY DAVID

A Twice-Told Tale by Robert R. Mill

Corporal David made notes as the policeman told his story:

Warren Gilman, 42. Nathan Gilman, 36. Elmer Gilman, 34. Brothers. Residence, 39 Church Street, Tranquil Lake.

At 5:10 A.M., alarm of fire sounded from Gilman residence. Fireman Gilbert Owens, first man to enter, found Warren and Nathan, who slept together, dead in bed in front room at south of second floor. Bodies burned beyond recognition. Room almost destroyed. Owens passed bodies to neighbors. Then made his way to front room at north side of second floor. There he found Elmer in bed unconscious. Rooms filled with smoke, but no flames. Owens carried Elmer to window. Felt moisture on coat of pajamas. Played flashlight over it. Saw blood bubbling from wound in left chest. Elmer taken to Tranquil Lake General Hospital. Pronounced dead by Dr. A. D. Prince.

Corporal David interrupted with questions, then wrote down the answers.

Gilman brothers lived alone. Had office on first floor of house. Insurance and investments. Also played stock market. Regarded as close and universally disliked. No friends. No known association with women. All regarded as wealthy. Recreations, golf and target shooting. Brothers were apparently on best of terms.

Corporal David closed his notebook. "Found any gun?" he demanded.

A look of triumph crossed the face of Chief McCormick.

"We have. After Gilbert Owens passed Elmer out, he went back to hunt for the bullet in the mattress. Couldn't find a thing. I got there then, and I told him to bundle up everything and bring it here. When we unrolled the bundle here, this dropped out."

He held a revolver toward Corporal David—who, however, made no move to accept it.

"Handled it that way before?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Chief McCormick. "Reckon we passed it around a bit."

Corporal David took the gun. It was a .25-caliber revolver, with a long barrel, indicating it had been used for target purposes. He broke it open.

There was a cartridge in each of the six chambers. Three of the six cartridges had been exploded.

"This gun," said Corporal David, as he placed it in his pocket, "told the whole story. That story was there until you let half of the male population put their fingerprints upon it. Then you wiped out the best, and maybe the only, clue to the murderer of three men."

Chief McCormick's jaw dropped.

"Gosh! Never thought of that," he admitted. "But you say three men were murdered. How do you know that? Looked to me like Warren and Nathan was burned to death."

"Elmer was shot once, you said," Corporal David explained. "Three bullets have been fired from this gun. Use your head."

He walked from the room, motioning for Trooper Linton to follow. In the hall he paused.

"Now, Linny, we have to work fast. You chase around to the Gilman home and give it the once-over. Then lock it up and put somebody on guard. Hire a man, if you have to. Then scout around and get the low-down on the three brothers. 'Low-down' is probably the right word. From what I have heard, all three of them are charter members of the Better-dead Club. But that makes no never-mind."

"Get the low-down on their financial condition, too; they played the market. I'll meet you here about noon."

LINTON departed. Corporal David turned to Chief McCormick, who stood in a doorway.

"Say," he demanded, "where is the district attorney?"

"Gone after Albert James, the gun expert."

The Corporal swore softly.

"Aint got much use for him, have you?" asked McCormick curiously.

"No," the man in the gray uniform admitted, "I haven't. He is a good man on guns. We can use him on that. But he has a lot of half-baked theories on other things he knows nothing about. And he tries to make you see things that aren't there to see. That's why I don't care to get mixed up with James."

He walked away.

"You can tell James and the district attorney that, if you care to," he called over his shoulder.

His first stop was the General Hospital, where he conferred with the physician.

"Here is the bullet we took from Warren's forehead," said Dr. Prince, "and here is the one from Nathan's forehead. Death was instantaneous in both cases. We had to use the X-ray to find the bullets."

Corporal David accepted the bullets, marked them and put them in the pocket of his blouse.

"Here is the bullet that killed Elmer," the physician continued. "I found it between his back and the back of his pajama coat. It had just force enough to leave the body, but not force enough to puncture the garment."

"Did Elmer die instantly?" asked Corporal David.

"No," said the physician. "The fireman who found him told me he saw blood bubbling from the wound. That would indicate he was alive. He was dead when I saw him. He must have died on the way here."

"How long do you think he lived after receiving the wound?"

"Between an hour and an hour and a half."

The broad forehead of David was wrinkled in thought.

"The alarm was sounded at five-ten A.M. They took Warren and Nathan out first. They probably got to Elmer about twenty minutes later. I presume the house is only a short distance from the hospital. Therefore, Elmer died about five-thirty. Consequently, it is safe to assume that he was shot some time between four and four-thirty."

The physician nodded assent. Both men turned to greet Sellers, the district attorney, and James, the gun expert. The Corporal handed the revolver and the three bullets to the latter.

"How about them?" he demanded.

James seated himself before a wicker table. He fixed a glass in his eye, produced another glass and a rule, and examined the muzzle of the revolver. Then he examined the bullets. He made several measurements. Then he looked up.

"These bullets," he began, speaking with a slow drawl, "were fired from this gun. That is my best opinion. After a more thorough examination I am sure physical facts will verify the

opinion. I will be able to swear to the physical facts in court."

"You are able to testify to a lot of things," thought Corporal David. Aloud he murmured, "Thanks." Then he turned to Sellers.

"Didn't take you gentlemen long to get here."

"I made a hasty preliminary investigation," said the district attorney, "and then I called Captain Field. My next step was to go in my car for Mr. James. I knew you all would be needed."

CORPORAL DAVID nodded assent. Then he turned as the door opened, and Trooper Linton entered. "Thought I would find you here—" he began.

"Shut up!" ordered Corporal David. He faced the local officials.

"Looks as if we are getting somewhere. Three men have been murdered." He pointed to the revolver. "There is the gun that killed them. The fire was just a blind." He raised a warning finger at Trooper Linton, who obviously was struggling with the desire to speak. "Just a moment." He turned to Chief McCormick, who was coming toward the little group. "Who turned in the alarm?"

"A half-wit named John Small," the policeman answered.

"We met Mr. Small," said the corporal. He glanced at his companion, with triumph reflected upon his face. "Now we'll meet him again."

Trooper Linton could contain himself no longer.

"It won't get us a thing. This was an inside job!" he blurted.

Before the Corporal could answer, the door opened again and five men entered. One was John Small, and another wore the uniform of a fireman. The tallest of the other three stepped forward.

"I am George Knight of the *Star*," he began. He introduced his companions. He indicated the fireman, and Small. Addressing Corporal David, he said: "These gentlemen had a little difference of opinion. Owens the fireman says he carried Elmer Gilman out. Small says *he* did. So we persuaded them to come along and see you."

Corporal David turned to Small.

"I must warn you that anything you say may be used against you. Now then, were you in the Gilman house this morning?"

"I was," the old man admitted. "Old John Small goes everywhere. He never sleeps. He was walking by. He saw the fire. He pulled the alarm. Then he broke a window beside the porch and climbed in. He toted Elmer to the window."

"See this man?" demanded Corporal David. He indicated the fireman.

"No, John Small didn't."

"You say you carried Elmer out?" the Corporal asked the fireman.

"I did," came the answer.

"See Small?"

"I did not."

"Suppose you two run over to the firehouse," suggested Corporal David. "We'll see you there later." He turned to the reporters. "And if you gentlemen will excuse us for a moment, we may have a formal statement to give you."

"Sure," said Knight. "We'll wait on the steps."

Corporal David addressed Linton.

"Now, then, what do you mean, it was an inside job?"

"Listen," began Trooper Linton. "I examined the house. There was nothing broken except the window both Small and the fireman said they used to enter. That's plain enough, even for a corporal."

Corporal David ignored this.

"Who owns that revolver? Does anybody know?"

"Yes," said the district attorney. "Warren Gilman owned it. I happen to know that he used it to shoot at a target in the basement of his home."

"Did Elmer ever shoot the gun?" asked the Corporal.

"Sure he did," interrupted Chief McCormick. "He often bragged about what a good shot he was. And he said he kept the gun in his room."

"What else did you find?" asked Corporal David.

"The Gilmans' business is in fine shape," said Trooper Linton. "No affairs with women. They did play the stock-market. But they won. They were short on Universal Engines when it dropped, and they cleaned up a pile. Their banker told me that." He consulted his notes. "The banker's name is Peter Wilson."

Sellers shrugged.

"Well, Corporal, it looks as if it is all over. We will be forced to face the facts. It will be a great blow to the entire community, for if the Gilmans were not loved, at least they were respected. My duty will be very distasteful."

Corporal David walked to the center of the room. His thumbs were hooked in his gun-belt.

"What do you consider your duty?" he demanded.

"Pardon me," said Sellers. "I should have said the coroner's duty." He turned to Dr. Prince. "You will return the verdict."

"What verdict?" asked Corporal David.

The drawl of James answered:

"You are supposed to be an expert investigator. You have three men killed by bullets from the same gun. The gun was in the room of one of them. You know he was an expert in its use. You know the two brothers sleeping together died instantly. You know they couldn't have done the job because the gun was left in the room

of the third brother. What is the answer, Corporal?"

"Elmer, of course," admitted Corporal David. "But show me a motive." Sellers pondered.

"I am not experienced in these affairs, but couldn't something have embittered him against his brothers?"

James nodded assent.

Corporal David faced the officials.

"You want me to believe Elmer killed his two brothers. You want me to believe he then went back to his room and went to bed. You want me to believe he killed himself. Well, I won't do it. Even if he had killed his two brothers—and you can't show me a motive for that—right then he would have been all through. I think the house was entered by an outsider, who killed the brothers, and started the fire."

The gun-expert's dry laugh halted him.

"He must have been a remarkable man," James drawled. "He entered a locked house without leaving a trace. He knew a gun was in the house, and he used that gun. He fled, leaving the house locked." His voice grew caustic. "You are outnumbered, Corporal!"

"Very well," said Corporal David. "Call the reporters."

They entered.

"These gentlemen," said Corporal David, "believe Elmer Gilman killed his two brothers and then killed himself. Every physical fact supports their belief. Yet I don't agree—"

He lifted his hand.

"No, I can't tell you who did it. That's my job to find out. You fellows can play with me, or ride me. Take your choice."

The tall reporter stepped forward. "We like your face. Who shall we quote to the effect that this was an outside job?"

The man in gray smiled. He hooked his thumbs again in his gun-belt.

"Blame Corporal Edward David, of the State Police."

AT the firehouse both Small and Owens repeated their stories.

Corporal David was brief.

"You admit you were in the Gilman home?"

"Sure, old John Small was," replied the old man.

"That's enough for me," declared Corporal David. He stepped forward. "John Small, I arrest you for the murder of the Gilmans."

The old man's jaw dropped. But Trooper Linton stepped forward.

"You must be crazy, David—trying to play super-cop. Snap out of it, partner!" He produced his notebook. "At two o'clock this morning Jess Putnam, one of the leading merchants here, picked up Small about nine miles from Tranquil Lake. Their car broke down

about five miles from here. They didn't get in to the village until after five o'clock. Putnam was with Small when they walked from the garage, saw the fire in the Gilman house, and turned in the alarm. It all checks up. Get that, partner."

Corporal David's shoulders drooped. "Sorry, Linny. Sorry, old John Small. You can go any time now." He turned to the others. "Guess Linny was right; I lost my head. Probably trying to play super-cop." He grinned. "Well, let's eat."

After lunch they went to the Gilman house. The floor was covered with sawdust.

"What's this?" demanded Corporal David. "Who thought of it?"

"I did," said Sellers. "I realized the water would ruin the woodwork, so I gave a man an order to enter and spread the sawdust."

"That's why the guard I hired let him in," explained Trooper Linton.

"Good enough," admitted Corporal David. "That explains everything. Now let's try to find something important."

They searched the house at length, but without result. . . .

That night at the hotel Corporal David obtained a reluctant promise from Sellers to wait until the following night to render the formal verdict. The district attorney, after giving the promise, remained in the room of the troopers. He suggested that the reporters be invited in. He talked of police-work, sports and kindred subjects. It was after three o'clock when Sellers left.

"Not a bad egg," was Knight's verdict.

Corporal David grinned.

"No," he admitted. "But he doesn't like us. What I want is something to prevent him turning in a formal verdict. Arresting John Small would have done it, but Linny gummed that up!" He turned to Trooper Linton. "Not that I am blaming you, Diphtheria—I didn't have time to tip you off."

Then he glanced keenly at Knight. "How about selling some prominent citizen on the idea of forming a citizens' committee and demanding an outside investigation? That will be rough on us, but it will give us time to work."

Knight grinned. "I probably can do it. Who would you suggest?"

"In a small town," Corporal David explained, "the banker usually is the works. Linny, in your ravings today—or yesterday, rather—you said something about a banker you honored with some of your conversation."

Trooper Linton produced his notes. "His name is Peter Wilson."

Knight made a note, and departed.

Ten minutes later the snores of Corporal David vied for supremacy with those of Trooper Linton. . . .

Corporal David, who preferred late and hearty breakfasts, was in the dining-room that morning when Trooper Linton, who had been working for several hours, came in hurriedly. Excitement was reflected upon his face. He flopped into a chair beside the Corporal. The latter calmly drained the last drops of coffee from a pot into a cup and flavored it liberally with sugar.

"Anybody chase you?" he asked. "I told you to wait for me. You'll keep on running around alone in these small towns, and something is going to happen to you!"

"All through?" demanded Trooper Linton. "When you have given your tongue and your teeth their morning workout, maybe you will be willing to get down to business. Say the word, Corporal?"

Corporal David reluctantly stepped away from the table.

"Guess they won't bring anything else in. Shoot, Trooper."

"WELL," began Linton, "I went out among the population and mingled, just as you told me to. The first bird I tried to mingle with told me the Boy Scout meeting was two blocks away. I had better luck with the next. He allowed that if we were going to arrest desperate characters like old John Small, we better tack two guns on our belts. I fixed it right for you by explaining you were subject to brain-flashes."

Trooper Linton paused for breath.

"The third guy I mingled with I beat to the draw. I started right in by telling him what a bum outfit this is. I explained that I hoped to get out the end of the month. I told him that the dumber you were, the higher up you got. He allowed that you ought to be head of the department, and I told him I had often told you that. Then I asked him what his arguments were."

"Started to arrest old John Small," he croaked, then lost his nerve. Small gave a good alibi, so that dumb Corporal let him go."

"I registered polite surprise, as that movie queen who made a fool out of you last summer would say. I asked him if he wouldn't have done the same."

"No," he snaps, "I wouldn't—not if I was a cop, or trying to be a cop."

"I asked him why not. He tells me: 'Dave, John Small and Jess Putnam were seen in Tranquil Lake at one o'clock on the morning of the murder. This guy I mingled with saw them.'"

Corporal David whistled softly.

"And who was the guy you mingled with?"

Trooper Linton's notes were produced.

"Vacuum-head. No, that isn't his name—that was what he called you."

I put it down so I wouldn't forget it. Here it is: William North."

He folded the paper and placed it carefully in the pocket of his blouse.

"Don't want to lose that name."

"North isn't a hard name to remember," said Corporal David.

"Vacuum-head is," Trooper Linton objected. "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. Mr. North is in the real-estate business. He hands out cards. I saved one for you."

"There are a whole lot of things I would rather have you do."

"Sure," Trooper Linton admitted, "you would rather have me find out why John Small lied."

"No," David objected, "I would rather have you find out why Jess Putnam lied. I am a lot more interested in him."

Knight walked into the room. "Wilson now is a famous man," he began. "He is chairman of the citizens' committee. That committee, with some slight prompting, has demanded an outside investigator." Knight's eyes twinkled. "They appeared not to be satisfied with the way you boys are functioning."

Corporal David grinned. "Who is the investigator?"

"Captain Field," the reporter answered. "If my information is correct, Captain Field is the commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop. I have promised to meet him when he arrives, and tell him what bums you are."

"Before you do that," Corporal David begged, "tell me how Peter Wilson took the suggestion."

"I was going to talk to you about that," Knight said. "At first he protested against the whole thing—said the local authorities were entirely competent. He was in earnest about it too. Then he switched just as abruptly. I gave him a sales-talk, of course; but I am not quite that good."

"You are good," Corporal David admitted, "but I don't think you are that good either. Well, my enemy, let's walk to the front porch and part with bitter words."

There were loungers in the chairs, and a group of people across the street.

"You are a dirty, double-crossing bum!" Corporal David roared at Knight. "I don't want to see you near me again!"

The reporter backed away. "You may be as big as a house, but you don't scare me!" he retorted. He started down the street. "Yea, Vacuum-head!" he called over his shoulder.

THAT afternoon Captain Field piloted Border King, his big black horse, into Tranquil Lake. Knight met him upon his arrival. Men standing by declared the commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop left the conference with a promise to wring

the necks of Corporal David and Trooper Linton.

But that pleasure was denied the commanding officer, for the two men could not be found. So Captain Field called a conference of all parties interested in the case for late that night in the offices of the district attorney.

It was after midnight when the group assembled. Sellers stood at the end of the table. James the gun-expert sat at his right; the banker Wilson at his left. Dr. Prince, the coroner, stood in one corner of the room. Captain Field, and Knight, sat upon a bench near the table. Reporters and citizens were gathered in the rear.

Sellers took charge.

"We are assembled here at the request of Captain Field. I think I am quoting him correctly when I say he wants facts, not half-baked theories."

The big man in gray nodded assent.

The banker struggled to his feet.

"As chairman of the citizens' committee, I wish to explain that Captain Field is here at our request. That does not mean we are not satisfied with our local officers. They have seen their duty, and met it nobly. We merely wish to end the bungling that has existed in certain quarters." He paused.

"Gentlemen, I have made a preliminary investigation," Captain Field said. "I have found nothing to disprove the theory held by your officers. The revolting nature of this crime, however, prompts me to suggest that we hold off just a bit longer."

A note of apology crept into his voice.

"Two of the men I command, who have been working on this case, have vanished. I want to look them up, hear their story, and take such action as I may find necessary."

His frank smile shone out.

"I wish I could make you gentlemen understand how I regret all this. We never were popular here. Mr. Sellers was broad enough to overlook that. Now we have been found wanting in this emergency."

Sellers made a gesture which was intended to be gracious.

"Any other business?" he asked.

The drawl of the gun-expert arose in the ensuing silence.

"My final examinations conclusively prove that all three mortal bullets—that is, the bullets taken from the bodies—were fired from the revolver found in Elmer Gilman's room. I am prepared to swear to that fact—I am prepared to demonstrate it to any jury. I can demonstrate it here."

"Not now," Captain Field objected. "It's after one o'clock." He yawned. "I do like to sleep occasionally."

"How about a statement regarding your troopers?" demanded one of the reporters.

Captain Field smiled. "How can I make a statement about them? I don't even know where they are."

The door opened. Trooper Linton entered, saluted the Captain, and stood beside the table. Behind him came John Small and Jess Putnam. Corporal David was the last man to enter. He saluted Captain Field, and that officer returned the greeting.

"Now then, Trooper Linton," the Corporal barked, "stand with your back to this door. Nobody goes out of here, and nobody comes in." His keen glance roved over the room. "The whole cast is here."

The drawl of the gun-expert cut in: "Perhaps we are going to be treated to another dramatic arrest."

"Right!" barked Corporal David. He pointed an accusing finger at John Small. His words were addressed to the Captain.

"This man, who calls himself old John Small, admits he was in the Gilman house right after the murder. He claims he carried Elmer to the window. A fireman claims the same thing, but says he didn't see Small."

"Small claims he wasn't in Tranquil Lake that morning until too late to have done the murders. Jess Putnam supports him in that claim. But Trooper Linton located a man who saw them both hours earlier. What is that man's name, Trooper Linton?"

The trooper, standing in the doorway, consulted his notes.

"Vac—I mean William North. He is in the real-estate business."

"Both Mr. North and Mr. Putnam," said Sellers, "are leading citizens of this town."

"That's fine!" retorted Corporal David. "I am going to give Leading Citizen Putnam just five minutes to tell me why he lied. I want him to tell me why he prompted old John Small to lie. Before he tells me this, I am going to warn him that anything he may say will be used against him. If he doesn't tell me, I am going to arrest him and John Small for the murder of the Gilman brothers."

Putnam moistened his lips. His voice came as if from a distance:

"I—I have nothing to say."

Corporal David produced a pair of handcuffs. He tossed them into the lap of Peter Wilson the banker.

"Hold them, will you? I may need them, and need them quick."

He turned to Small.

"You there, old John Small—I warn you that anything you may say will be used against you. Now then, tell me why you lied! And if you don't, I'll arrest you sure-fire this time. Quick, now!"

The watery eyes of the old man wavered. He turned to Trooper Linton, standing guard at the door.

"You are the friend of old John Small. John Small did lie. He lied

because this man told him to." The old man pointed at Putnam.

"That's good!" snapped Corporal David. "Why did he tell you to lie?"

"Old John Small doesn't know."

The aged man's fingers twitched; his knees shook; he seemed about to fall. The Corporal came to his side, and his huge arm crept across the thin shoulders as he piloted the old man to a place vacated by Captain Field.

"Buck up, old John Small." David's big hand pressed the thin one wavering before him. "I know you are innocent. You aren't going to jail. Just try to tell me everything that happened that night here in Tranquil Lake."

The old man struggled to control his wavering faculties. His words, when he spoke, sounded like a recitation.

"We put the car in the garage. Old John Small walked down the street with Mr. Putnam. We came to the house. There was a fight on the step. We went—"

"Wait a minute," Corporal David interrupted. "What house?"

"Mr. Wilson's house."

Wilson leaped from his chair. The handcuffs clattered to the floor.

"Sit down," ordered Corporal David, "and pick those up—I may need them." He turned to Small. "Who was fighting?"

"Mr. Wilson and Warren Gilman."

"Anybody else?"

"Another man. Old John Small couldn't see him."

"Good boy, old John Small. You've done your bit." Corporal David stood with his hand upon the bent shoulders of the old man as he faced Putnam.

"WHY did you tell this old man to lie?" he demanded.

"I did it because I was afraid—" Putnam began. Then the words fairly rushed out: "I was afraid of *him*." He pointed at the banker. "I knew he would take it out on me if we told. So that night I told old John Small to say nothing about seeing the fight. The next morning, when I learned what had happened, I knew it was nothing for us to be mixed up in. I found old John Small. I told him to say the car broke down. I told him to say we didn't get here until later than we did."

"Why are you afraid of Wilson?" demanded Corporal David.

"He owns me,"—Putnam blurted out the answer,—"*he owns me body and soul*."

"Yes!" The word came from between the lips of the Corporal like a bullet from a gun. "And he owns the district attorney!"

Sellers struggled to his feet, his face livid with rage.

"More heroics! More super-cop stuff! More—"

"Sit down, Sellers!" The deep voice of the captain of the Black Horse Troop boomed through the room. "Sit down, or I'll knock you down!" Captain Field faced Corporal David, respect, trust and affection in his eyes. "Go ahead, Sergeant," he said quietly.

Bewilderment spread over the face of Corporal David.

"If it please the Captain—"

"All right, Corporal," drawled Captain Field. "But I said *'Sergeant.'*" His face twisted in a crooked grin. "I meant it. Don't quibble with me, sir! Go ahead, Sergeant!"

SERGEANT DAVID advanced to the banker. "Pick up those cuffs."

Wilson's face was colorless. His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"Peter Wilson," said Sergeant David, "I arrest you for the murder of Warren Gilman, Nathan Gilman and Elmer Gilman!" He snapped the handcuffs into position. Then he turned to Captain Field.

"If it pleases the Captain, may I borrow his bracelets?"

Captain Field grinned.

"Haven't got them with me." He indicated Trooper Linton. "Borrow a pair from Corporal Linton."

Sellers made a blind dash for the door. Corporal Linton caught his outstretched hands and held him firm.

"Easy there," he cautioned. "If the traffic on this door keeps up, we'll have to put in a semaphore." He glared at Sellers reproachfully. "And you a district attorney too!" He grinned at Sergeant David. "Reckon the boy friend must have known what the Sergeant wanted!"

Again handcuffs clicked.

"Sellers, I arrest you as an accomplice in all these murders. I'll read them off for you, if you want."

The district attorney glared at him.

"Pull them away from the door, Corporal," ordered Sergeant David. "Now, James, you get out and stay out. I happen to know you had no part in this; all you did is what you usually do: You were hired to make Elmer Gilman the goat. You made all the evidence serve that end. You always do. I should pinch you, but I'm not going to. I am going to leave you to live with your thoughts at night."

The gun-expert slunk from the room. Sergeant David turned to the old man.

"You can go, old John Small." Then he pointed toward the glaring banker. "That bird offered one thousand dollars for information leading to the arrest of the murderer. He and his pals actually put up the money. You furnished that information, old John Small, so the grand is yours."

He turned to the coroner: "Thanks a lot, Doctor. You were on the level with us all the time."

He addressed Putnam: "You made a mistake when you lied. I think you have paid for it." There was a challenging smile upon his face as he glanced at Captain Field. "Anyway, Putnam, I am going to let you go," he added. "A super-cop has certain privileges."

Then he faced the reporters. "Well, boys, here is the low-down:

"Warren Gilman played the market, and he was a whiz. Always won. He grew to be an oracle. Even Wilson went to him for advice. He recommended Universal Engines. Then the stock dropped twenty points. Wilson had played so heavily that it cleaned him out. I expect the examiners to find a real mess over at his bank. It also cleaned out Sellers, who was let in on the good thing by Wilson. Incidentally, the only reason Sellers wasn't bankrupt long ago is because Wilson let him ride along. That was why he owned Sellers body and soul, just as he owned Putnam."

"Well, you can imagine how kindly Wilson and Sellers felt toward Warren Gilman. Then they found out he had played the stock short. Warren Gilman is dead; but from what I can find out, that is a trick quite true to type. But this time, instead of hitting the ordinary run of people, it hit Wilson and Sellers."

"They found this out the day Warren Gilman came home from a trip, and the day before the murder. They had the fight with him that night, just as old John Small described. Sellers was the man he couldn't recognize."

"Wilson went to the Gilman house that morning early. He knew the house. He knew the garage, connected with the house, was never locked. He knew the gun was in Elmer's room, and that it was loaded."

"He crept up there and got the gun, then went into Warren's room and shot him. Nathan woke up, and cowered under the sheet. Wilson fired again. The flare set fire to the sheet. Then he sneaked out. Elmer probably woke up and saw him. So the banker had to kill Elmer too."

Sergeant David turned to Sellers and Wilson. "That's right, isn't it?"

There was no answer.

"After the murder," David resumed, "Wilson went to Sellers, and they both tried to throw us off the track."

"In reality, this was an easy case. Captain Field suspected Sellers when the call first came in. Sellers hated us; he called us only because he hoped to get us in bad and escape punishment through blunders on our part."

"Then he made his first mistake—ordering the sawdust on the floor. I knew he had no love for the Gilmans. He put it there to destroy footprints—not to save woodwork. That made me begin to see light."

"He left to get James right after the crime was discovered. That wasn't logical. This was his big case; he could have phoned for James. But by going away, he gave Chief McCormick, who means well, a chance to bungle the case without putting any blame on Sellers—and McCormick did it, when he rubbed the fingerprints off the revolver."

"It is interesting about Small and Owens both claiming they carried Elmer out. I think they both did. They were just so excited they didn't see each other."

"But to get back to Sellers: He tipped us off by his own attitude. He stuck around our room one night. He wanted the reporters there. He pretended an interest in our work, but what he really wanted was to know just what we knew."

"I first connected Wilson when I tried to think of somebody with enough power over him to draw him into this thing. I knew he never did it himself. Bankers are usually all-powerful in a small town. Wilson gave it all away when he first opposed an outside investigator, and then eagerly assented when we pressed him."

"But all this wasn't legal evidence. The lucky break came when Corporal Linton found out Putnam and Small lied. Putnam told me the whole story before we came in here, and the show here was just ballyhoo. Putnam insisted upon it; he was so scared of Sellers he thought we couldn't make the charges stick."

Sergeant David saluted the reporters.

EARLY that morning, with Sellers and Wilson safely lodged in jail, Captain Field and Knight were occupying one bed in a room in the hotel. Sergeant David and Corporal Linton climbed into the other.

"Move over, Sergeant," ordered Corporal Linton.

"Move over yourself, Corporal!"

There was a sound of a scuffle, then silence. Then Linton sang softly:

State cops are dumb, and getting dumber;
Aint we got fun?

Corporals now are acting sergeants,
Lord, aint they dumb!

Again came the sound of a scuffle.

"Something tells me that two super-cops will soon be on stable duty!" came a voice from Captain Field's bed.

Once more silence reigned.

"Good night, Bad News," said Sergeant David.

Corporal Linton fumbled in the pocket of his blouse hanging near the bed. He produced a paper, unfolded it, and held it so the rays of the moon coming through the open window revealed the writing. For a moment he studied it, then replaced the paper.

"Good night, Vacuum-head!" he rejoined.

SLIM PERLEY got bumped while dancing in a night-club at Ensenada. The girl he was dancing with was surprised to find how sensitive he was about a harmless accidental bump. She had always known him as a good-natured, soft-voiced, hard-working fellow who sold used cars, up in San Diego; but south of the Border—eighty miles south of Tia Juana, to be exact—he turned into something else again.

It is a mental change that happens to lots of Americans when they cross to Lower California and buy huge straw sombreros and drink Mexican beer. Slim's sombrero was tall-peaked and of speckled roan horsehair. Although he did not have it on at the night-club, it had lots to do with his state of mind. Otherwise that bump would not have ended as it did, in a shoot-out.

Slim said to the chunky long-haired man who had almost knocked him over: "Say, listen, you! Can't you see where you're going?"

The man scowled and yanked a shoestring mustache which made his mouth grim. "Of course I saw you, pilgrim," he bellowed. "But you didn't get out of my way. What's the matter with you?"

The marimbas and gourds stopped on an off-beat. The Mexican couples backed away, frightened. Even the frogs in the sea-marsh—Ensenada's perpetual nocturne—stopped dead still. American dancers chuckled. And Slim gaped, speechless. The man actually was not afraid of him! It was incredible until Slim realized that he was not wearing his roan hat. *That* explained it!

For Slim's particular hat was a trophy for sharpshooting at a rodeo the last Saint's Day. It made him the champion marksman down here, for everybody competed—soldiers from Ensenada's barracks, market-hunters who shot quail and game, shark-fishermen, vaqueros from the cow outfits, even tourists. Slim Perley was down here on that week-end with Molly and her father, and Slim won the hat.

He came down the next week-end to show a customer what a car could do in the coastal mountains south of Tia Juana. It was fun seeing the Mexican boys pointing him out to tourists. People respected him; they were even afraid of him! No one had ever been afraid of him before, because he was a spindly fellow until he grew up, and always genial and joking. He came the next week-end and noticed how fellow-Americans at the auto camps and bars and curio-shops regarded him as one of the town characters—not exactly a desperado, but a gun-runner perhaps, the kind they have in stories. He got to going

out to the gun-club, where Hollywood stars, down for fishing, liked him. Raw-boned, gentle-voiced and very tall in that bright hat, he got a job or two as an extra up in Hollywood, and stopped selling cars.

When he was broke, he used his gun prowess as a market hunter, supplying quail and snipe and mallards for Ensenada's restaurants. And that was when Molly's father said to her: "That trophy hat has made Slim Perley a bum."

Molly's dad was down here on a real-estate deal, planning an auto camp. "I thought up a good slogan for the camp, Molly. 'From every cabin, a view of the original Treasure Island!' How's that for romance! When you come to Ensenada, romance gets in a fellow's blood."

"It's got in Slim's blood. Too much," Molly said.

The champion pistol-shot of Ensenada puts a bullet through his enemy's hat—and wins victory through subsequent defeat.

by

KENNETH
PERKINS

Better than

"Slim's all right. He'd be swell if somebody would shoot a hole in that hat."

"I'll tell him so tonight."

At the dance at the night-club Molly told him. "You're the champion shot, aren't you, Slim? You think it makes you the local bad-man. Well, it's also making you a—"

And it was right then that Slim got bumped.

As the stranger strutted off, the proprietor ran to Slim. "Don't mind him, señor! Please! He acts like the desperado, so people won't bother his truck-garden. Just a peddler of cu-

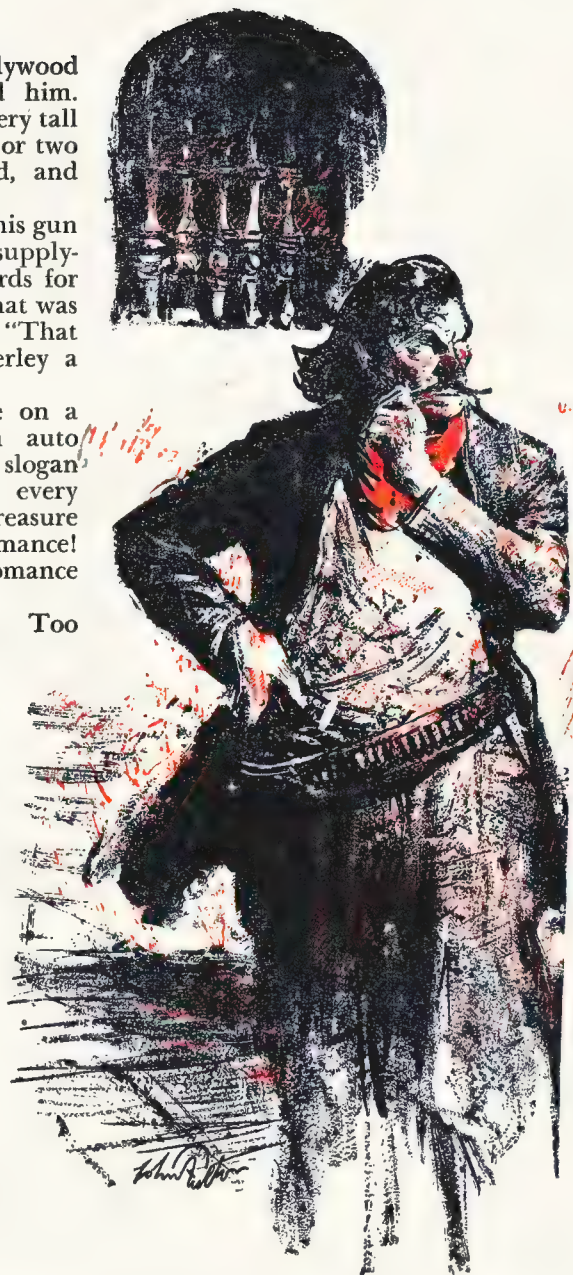
cumbers and beans out the borax mine. Nobody to get excite' about."

"Let him just bump me again!" Slim growled.

He got the bump he wanted when he was about to take Molly home to her dad out at the hotel on the beach. Slim had his speckled roan hat on now, but the man almost walked right through him!

Slim got his balance. "You did it once too often, hoppergrass."

"Well, I declare!" the man gasped. He stuck a thumb in his velvet vest, straightened up with one Congress boot thrust forward like an orator.





Illustrated by
John Fulton

a Champion

"Can I believe my ears! You can't know who you're talking to. My name's Pardee, sir. The Texas John Pardee!"

"Never heard of you." But Slim discovered the next moment that this magnificent shabby fellow was more dangerous than he looked. Evidently, being a permanent resident, he had some dicker with the police about carrying firearms—perhaps because of trouble out at his lonely truck-garden. For from the tails of his frock coat he whipped out two guns.

Molly jumped between and faced Texas John. "Of all the blowflies!

You get out of here!" She was like a mother spreading her skirts to protect a child. "You wouldn't talk so windy if Slim had a gun too!"

The Americans, as well as the Mexicans, cheered her. Even Texas John grinned. "Ma'am, I wouldn't think of hurting him when you speak in his defense. My apologies."

But she had to have the last word, for the crowd was chuckling at Slim. "You didn't happen to notice his hat, did you?" She added, smiling: "Slim won it shooting six eggs in the air!"

Texas John turned, and the hooting stopped. "Slim, if that's your name,"

he said majestically, "when I draw, I don't shoot eggs. I shoot men!"

Slim swallowed. And Texas John stalked off, shaking the imaginary heat out of his guns as if he had actually fired them. . . .

Next morning Slim had the feeling that the glory of his hat was gone. Walking to the Chinese restaurant for breakfast, he imagined that the little boys did not stare at him any more. The young Mexicans hanging around the poolroom did not get out of his way. American tourists grinned at him. One of them, puffing a *cigarillo*, said: "Listen, brother, where can I buy me one of those fancy hats?"

"You can't buy 'em. You got to win 'em," Slim snapped.

But the Mexican druggist, standing at his open-front store, said: "The postmaster has one he will sell, señor. His brother-in-law won it as a trophy, but left it when he went off to El Paso."

So the roan hat, according to the druggist, could be worn by anybody from now on! The spell was broken. That is, temporarily.

AT breakfast Slim heard that Texas John was in town and had asked where he could get a crate of laying hens. Slim went back to his auto camp and got his gun; he was anxious to find out how this Texas John would talk to a man who was heeled.

A vendor cooking tortillas on a clay griddle told him that Señor Texas was in the hay-and-grain store waiting for his crate of hens.

"Do me a favor, Pancho," Slim said. "Go in there and tell him I want to see him out here in the street. 'Shoots men, not eggs!' Tell him I'm ready to be shot any time before dinner."

The vendor finished patting a tortilla excitedly: "The shoot-out here in the street! Sanctissima Madre, I'll be the horned toad!"

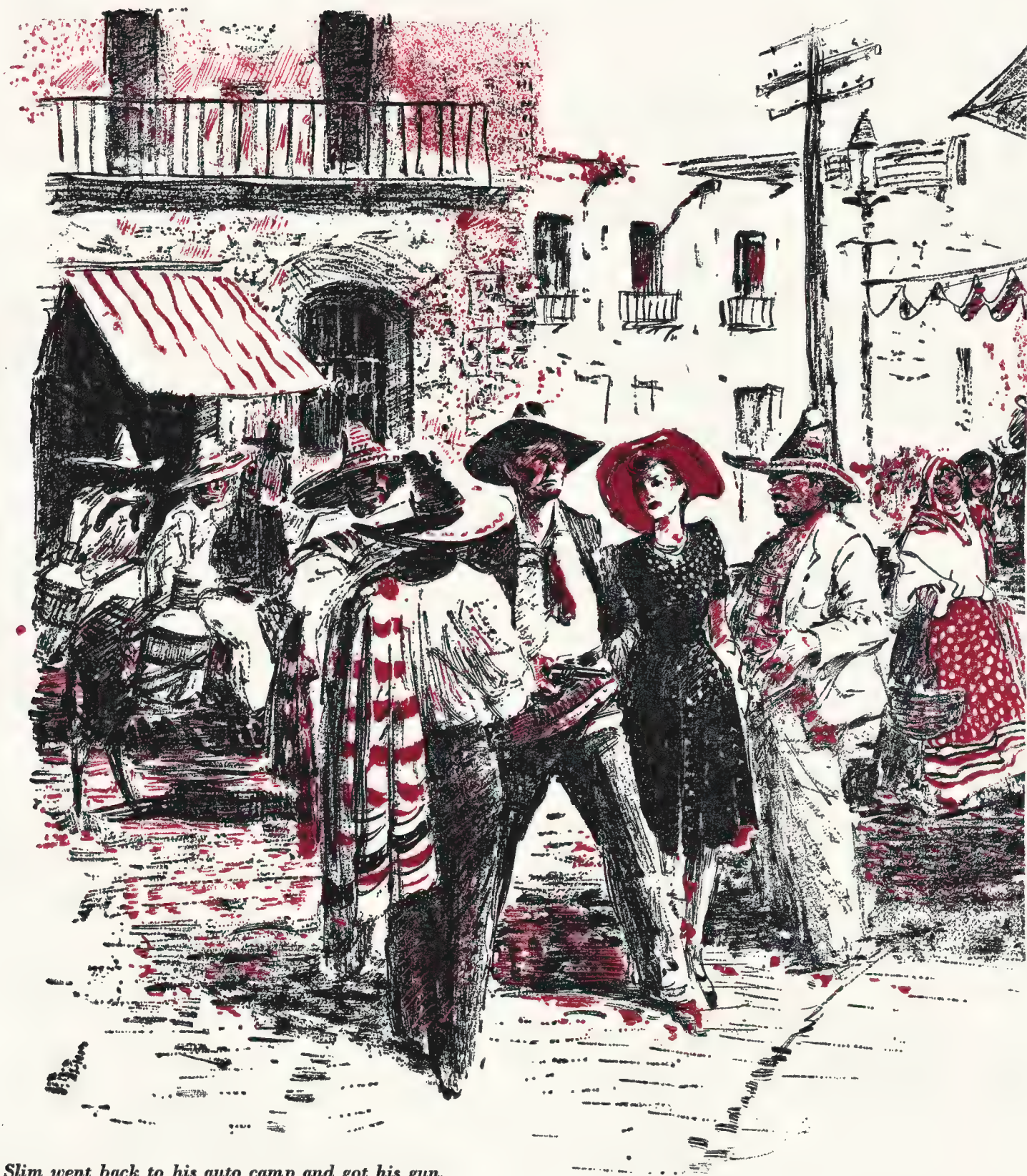
Slim waited, leaning against a wooden-wheeled cart, facing the soft Pacific breeze. Pancho crept into the hay-and-grain store. He must have been nervous about delivering the challenge, for nothing happened—not at first.

The few men at that end of Ensenada's main street sensed trouble—a goat-rancher, a man feeding alfalfa leaves to chickens, a photographer with a burro. They talked in dulcet voices about the imminence of death. They shrugged. "Ees too bad! Especially for Señor Slim."

"What's too bad?" Slim asked.

"Thees Texas John will kill you, I think so." Another said: "Maybe you are good shot like a bad-man, but he is worse."

Slim was about to remind them that there was only room enough for one



Slim went back to his auto camp and got his gun.

bad *hombre* in Ensenada, and he was it. But he listened. This Texas John, they said, rented the waste-water out at the mine. Everyone else who had tried to grow vegetables below the mine dump had been chased off by the sutler, who didn't like competition for his canned stuff. The sutler would cut the water conduit and dry-gulch the tomatoes and pinto beans and cu-

cumbers. Cholos and Indians would do the same thing, to water their horses. Truck-gardening in that desert took a fighting man. "Thees Texas John—no one dare cut his pipe some more," the druggist asserted. "He was trick shooter for big rodeo company one time. Killed men too, maybe. Why else does he live here below the Border?"

A baritone boomed from inside the hay-and-grain store. "What! Do I hear you right? You little wart! You say he wants to see me outside—*me!* Can I believe my ears!"

Slim's Adam's apple went up and down. If this turned out to be a real gun-fight, he would go to jail—if he won. A telegraph clerk, three fish-canners from a bar, two tourists had



helplessly at a bar where he might duck. And behind the bar's swinging door he saw two Hollywood actors from the gun-club grinning at him. The photographer focused on Slim and the cart and snapped his picture. And worst of all, a girl came riding down the street in a sport roadster.

Molly stopped at the curb. "Slim Perley! What are you doing, wearing that gun?"

Slim poked at some crucifixion thorn with his boot. "I got a hunting license. They let me wear it—"

"Don't tell me! You're picking a fight. I heard at the hotel about Texas John. They said it's lucky he didn't kill you last night!"

"The señorita got in the way, that's why," someone laughed from the pool hall.

Everyone grinned as Slim wiped his lips. He managed to mumble: "It's too late, Molly. I can't get out of it."

"Tell him," the voice in the store boomed, "tell him I'll burn down on him! The pie-eatin' young lizard! I'll bullet-burn his hide so he'll be too dead to skin—soon as I get through with my shopping!"

Molly and Slim looked at each other. It occurred to both that Texas John was going to do an awful lot, but he seemed in no hurry to come out in the street. "You stay here, Slim," Molly said, looking wise. "I'll put a stop to this."

"Wait, Molly!" But she ran into the store, and Slim was afraid to follow. For she would be right in the middle if there was any gun-play. He rubbed his holster, badgered by the crowd.

"Take your chance now, Señor Slim! Vamoose when to vamoose is good!"

Inside the store, Molly faced Texas John, who stood puffing as if getting breath for another blow-out. "Listen, Mister," Molly said sweetly. "When you start all that terrible shooting, what do you think Slim will be doing?"

"Listening to the singing, ma'am. He'll seem to be listening to songs in his front parlor, only he won't hear 'em!"

The storekeeper and the tortilla-vendor were scared to death. But Molly's lips curled. "I don't want you to murder him, Mister. If you just won't step out in the street—for my sake!"

"For your sake, ma'am," Texas John said chivalrously, "I won't commit the murder. What would I gain? The *carcel*, prison for life, or else the adobe wall! For your sake I'll forgive him—this once! I won't go out there in the street—to kill him! That is—if someone will just get my horse around to the back corral."

It was no anticlimax, the way he said it. He picked up his crate of hens and strutted out the back door.

Outside, Slim waited, hoofing like the old steers in the Tia Juana bull-ring. More tourists and Mexicans stood in doorways of saloons, the drug-store, the American consul's cottage. They saw the tortilla-vendor come out and unhitch a whiskered old calico from the rack. This meant perhaps that Texas John wanted a clear range when he came out of that door!

But it was Molly who came out, just before the police arrived. She went to Slim and said before the scattered crowd drifted up: "There'll be no fight this morning, Slim." Although enormously relieved, she was still a bit shaky. "He ran away."

"I knew it!" Slim laughed. "The man's gun-shy."

THE Mexicans crowded around, but they could not understand what had happened, except that the American señorita had stopped the fight. The hay-and-grain man, joining the bunch on the sidewalk, gave his explanation to the Americans. "She talked the bad *hombre* out of it. And he's got savvy. Why get the adobe wall for a murder?"

"She saved the Señor Slim again!" a barkeep voiced the town's opinion. "Same as she saved him last night! *Bueno!* The Señor Slim, he is lucky!"

Slim stared agast. So *that's* what they thought! There was gentle Mexican laughter. Then the photographer waved a picture at him. "Is finished, señor, your picture with the wooden cart and the gun—before the shoot-out!"

Slim choked. He saw red. And he saw something worse: Texas John was sneaking out of the back corral, socking heels into his old calico, galumphing off for the canebrake. Slim could not believe his eyes. Texas John was wearing a tall-peaked speckled roan hat!

"Slim!" Molly said anxiously. "Where are you going?"

"To the auto-camp to get my car. No, I'm not going to kill him, Molly. I'm not even going to hurt him." He raised his voice to the crowd: "I'm just going to put six button-holes in that hat!"

He could not catch Texas John at first, for a horseman has the advantage in that country. You can't drive a car faster than a walk in Ensenada.

Slim followed an arroyo into bad country where only creosote could grow. Near the mine dump nothing could grow at all—except one spot of sparkling green. This was Texas John's vegetable patch, fed by waste water that came down the hill-sized slag dump.

In the midday heat-waves, Slim saw Texas John's body swell and shrink in the mirage as he stooped over his crate. Even in the humble work of turning his hens into the chicken-wire

joined the crowd. One of the latter said: "Don't let him bluff you, brother!"

The gentler Mexicans advised: "Ees better if you ride from town, Señor Slim." The druggist added: "It would be best not to wear that hat some more."

Inside the store Texas John roared: "Well, you go tell that young two-spot I'll sure enough see him in the street! I'll see him curled up! I'll gun-whip him, that's what! I'll make orphans of his sheep!"

This roaring, curiously, did not frighten Slim a bit. But he looked anxious. To risk a Mexican jail or back down before the whole town—which was wiser? He glanced about

corral, there was something regal about him, and something phony. Why did this picturesque showman stoop to peddling tomatoes and beans? What the town said might be true. The man could be a killer, avoiding gun-fights now so that his past would not catch up with him!

It might be unwise to fight him on his own squat, where Texas John had all the right on his own side. But Slim heard Molly chugging in the barranca sand-ruts behind him. He was not going to have her "save him" a third time!

Slim turned his car onto a gypsum bed, walked through the tomato patch and stopped within reasonable range, kicking at a piece of slag.

Texas John Pardee looked up, his maned head tilted under the roan sombrero. He grinned fiercely.

"Yes—you want something?"

"Just to settle a point, hopper-grass! There can't be two speckled roan hats worn around here. Let's decide which hat stays on."

The big man got up and brushed the dust from his velvet vest. He gave his stage scowl, but this time it was more tragic than terrifying. "Am I hearing right?" he began, but the ring was gone from his voice. "That is, I mean to say—if you know the truth about me—"

Slim cut in: "Where'd you get that hat, hoppergrass?"

Texas John answered almost courteously: "Well, I—the postmaster gave it to me; said if I'd wear one out here, these bronco Indians wouldn't bother me."

"I'll make this short, doodlebug! It won't hurt." Slim drew and put three slugs into the crown of that sombrero, then three more ripped the rolled brim in seared lines.

Texas John staggered back, gaping in utter consternation. But he got his balance and flipped back his coat-tails. For that fleeting moment Texas John Pardee showed a flash of his battered majesty. His guns whipped out like two horned toads spitting.

Molly's scream outlasted the gun-echoes. Men crowded to the edge of the platform high on the slag-dump. More men stared from the platform of the sutler's store, halfway up the switchbacks.

Slim sprawled headlong at the first shot, sliding flat, unhurt. The slugs zipped high, kicking puffs of slag far behind him. Texas John was aiming not at where Slim lay, but where he had been a few seconds before!

The truth—that truth at which Texas John had hinted—came to Slim in a flash. "Hold it, pardner," he gasped. "The fight's over!"

Texas John scowled at him hard. "You hit, pilgrim?"

"Sure. Not with your slugs. With the truth. Between the eyes." Slim got up and walked toward him. "I can see why you're always scowling and bumping into folks." He said gently: "Friend, how long have you been blind?"

TEXAS JOHN'S magnificent pose crumpled. He stood puffing; he must have held his breath during that duel in the dark. He holstered his guns, and his hand went up to his tattered, smoke-streaked hat. His hawk nose twitched a little as he smelled the burned felt. He took the hat off and twirled it, feeling the holes with his fingers. "Neat bit of gun-play, pilgrim."

"Yours would have been neater," Slim said, "if the odds had been straight."

"I saw the blink of your gun clear enough. Saw your shape, too, like an old-man cactus walking. I can still see tolerable. Enough to dance, because I let the ladies lead. You can tell folks what you think, but I can still see enough to shoot when called upon! Just tell 'em that!"

"I'll tell anyone you aren't afraid to fight in the dark, friend!"

"They've got to think I can shoot, or they'll dry-gulch any squatter tries growing vegetables here. I thought I could bluff it out until it's time for the doctors to get this film off my eyes. Everything will be hunk then."

He felt the holes in his hat in a caressing way. "They say I'll see all right again. But I can't go back to my job of trick shooting. All I want is to work, don't matter what at, long as I make a living."

"Mind if I see what I did to that hat, friend?" Slim took the hat and examined it, compared it with his own as if weighing them both, then handed a hat to Texas John.

They had all crowded down the slag dump—hoist engineer, weighman, and muckers—even the superintendent. Everyone jabbered. The superintendent said: "Trying to get yourself salted, Slim, or what?"

"I was just coming up to see you about some good values in used cars, Chief. But I made the mistake of stepping on that gent's pinto beans. Pretty horny gent! He said he didn't want to kill me. He was just playing with me like a road-runner with a lizard. Look what he did to my hat!"

Molly's eyes seemed to smart a little. She had been the nearest witness to that duel, and had seen more than the others. She looked at the hat which was so punctured and tattered that it came down over Slim's ears—a size too large. Then she looked at the pompous figure of Texas John swinging grandly to his tar-papered home shack.

She whispered: "That makes you better than a champion, Slim."



STALIN'S Ural stronghold is a major factor in the present war. In spite of loss of much territory the Red armies are intact, fighting hard and effectively. They are getting munitions and replacements from Soviet factories.

Russia's old heavy industry center in the Ukraine has been largely lost or destroyed. But Stalin has a new base in the Urals built up during the last fifteen years by dint of tremendous sacrifices. It is this new industrial base which today is supplying the Red armies with much needed tanks, guns, spare parts, and munitions.

The Ural industrial district covers an area some five hundred miles square, almost in the center of the largest country in the world. Nature furnished the region with iron, coal, copper, aluminum, lead, asbestos, manganese, potash, gold, silver, platinum, zinc, and oil. During the thirties more than two hundred industrial enterprises were built and put into operation in this region. Costs were fantastically high, but this new industrial district is Russia's number one guarantee against defeat at the hands of Hitler.

For five years I worked in the Urals, helping to build Magnitogorsk. In this book I try to describe . . . the great fortress in the Urals which these Russians made and manned. This fortress is important for all of us, for it is today the world's greatest bulwark against Hitler.

PART ONE

I LEFT the University of Wisconsin in 1931 to find myself in an America sadly dislocated, an America offering few opportunities for young energy and enthusiasm.

I was smitten with the usual wanderlust. The United States did not seem adequate. I decided to go somewhere else. I had already been in Europe three times. Now . . . I decided to go to Russia to work, study, and to lend a hand in the construction of a society which seemed to be at least one step ahead of the American.

Following wise parental counsel I learned a trade before going to Russia. I went to work as welder's apprentice in the General Electric plant in Schenectady, and several months later received a welder's certificate. Armed with this, with credentials from the Metal Workers' Union of which I was an active member, and with letters from several personal friends, I set off for Berlin, where I applied for a Soviet visa.

In due course of time Soviet consular wheels ground out my visa and I entrained for Moscow. For ten days I bounced back and forth between sev-

BEHIND the URALS

This story of what a young American saw and experienced as a workman in the new industrial base created by the Russians behind the Urals shows the new Russia that has been created during the last decade, and makes clear the basic reasons for her successful resistance to the Nazi hordes.

by John Scott

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eral Soviet organizations, trying to make arrangements for a job. The welding trust was glad to give me work. They needed welders in many places. They were not able to sign me up, however, until the visa department had given me permission to remain in the Soviet Union as a worker.

Finally arrangements were completed, and I started out on the four-day train trip to a place called Magnitogorsk on the eastern slopes of the Ural Mountains.

I was very happy. There was no unemployment in the Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks planned their economy and gave opportunities to young men and women. Furthermore, they had got away from the fetishization of material possessions, which, my good parents had taught me, was one of the basic ills of our American civilization. I saw that most Russians ate only black bread, wore one suit until it disintegrated, and used old newspapers for writing letters and office memoranda, rolling cigarettes, making envelopes, and for various personal functions.

I was about to participate in the construction of this society. I was going to be one of many who cared not to own a second pair of shoes, but who built blast furnaces which were their own. It was September, 1932, and I was twenty years old. . . .

I plunged into the life of the town with the energy of youth. I literally wore out my Russian grammar, and in three months I was making myself understood. . . . I worked as hard and as well as my comparatively limited experience and training permitted.

**H I G H L I G H T S
o f t h e N E W B O O K S**

A DAY IN MAGNITOGORSK

THE big whistle on the power house sounded a long, deep, hollow six o'clock. All over the scattered city-camp of Magnitogorsk, workers rolled out of their beds or bunks and dressed in preparation for their day's work.

I climbed out of bed and turned on the light. I could see my breath across the room as I woke my roommate, Kolya. Kolya never heard the whistle. Every morning I had to pound his shoulder for several seconds to arouse him.

We pushed our coarse brown army blankets over the beds and dressed as quickly as we could—I had good American long woolen underwear, fortunately; Kolya wore only cotton shorts and a jersey. We both donned army shirts, padded and quilted cotton pants, similar jackets, heavy scarves, and then ragged sheepskin coats. We thrust our feet into good Russian "valinkis"—felt boots coming up to the knee. We did not eat anything. We had nothing on hand except tea and a few potatoes, and there was no time to light a fire in our little home-made iron stove. We locked up and set out for the mill.

It was January, 1933. The temperature was in the neighborhood of thirty-five below. A light powdery snow covered the low spots on the ground. The high spots were bare and hard as iron. A few stars crackled in the sky and some electric lights twinkled on the blast furnaces. Otherwise the world was bleak and cold and almost pitch-dark.

It was two miles to the blast furnaces, over rough ground. There was no wind, so our noses did not freeze. I was always glad when there was no wind in the morning. It was my first winter in Russia and I was not used to the cold.

Down beside the foundation of Blast Furnace No. 4 there was a wooden shanty. It was a simple clapboard structure with a corrugated-iron roof nailed on at random. Its one big room was dominated by an enormous welded iron stove placed equidistant from all the walls, on a plate of half-inch steel. It was not more than half-past six when Kolya and I walked briskly up to the door and pushed it open. The room was cold and dark. Kolya fumbled around for a moment for the switch and then turned on the light. It was a big five-hundred-watt bulb hanging from the ceiling and it illuminated every corner of the bare room. There were makeshift wooden benches around the walls, a battered table, and two three-legged stools stood in a corner. A half-open door opposite the entrance showed a tremendous closet whose walls were dec-

orated with acetylene torches, hose, wrenches, and other equipment. The floor of the closet was littered with electrodes, carbide generators, and dirt. The walls were bare except for two cock-eyed windows and a wall telephone. Kolya, the welders' foreman, was twenty-two, big-boned, and broad. There was not much meat on him, and his face had a cadaverous look which was rather common in Magnitogorsk in 1933. . . .

By the time the seven o'clock whistle blew, the shanty was jammed full of riggers, welders, cutters, and their helpers. It was a varied gang, Russians, Ukrainians, Tartars, Mongols, Jews, mostly young and almost all peasants of yesterday, though a few, like Ivanov, had long industrial experience. There was Popov, for instance. He had been a welder for ten years and had worked in half a dozen cities. On the other hand, Khaibulin, the Tartar, had never seen a staircase, a locomotive, or an electric light until he had come to Magnitogorsk a year before. His ancestors for centuries had raised stock on the flat plains of Kazakhstan. They had been dimly conscious of the Czarist government; they had had to pay taxes. Reports of the Kirghiz insurrection in 1916 had reached them. They had heard stories of the October Revolution; they even saw the Red Army come and drive out a few rich landlords. They had attended meetings of the Soviet, without understanding very clearly what it was all about, but through all this their lives had gone on more or less as before. Now Shaimat Khaibulin was building a blast furnace bigger than any in Europe. He had learned to read and was attending an evening school, learning the trade of electrician. He had learned to speak Russian, he read newspapers. His life had changed more in a year than that of his antecedents since the time of Tamerlane.

IVANOV, Kolya, and I entered the shanty just as the whistle started to blow. The cutters' brigadier¹ was already in the center of the room assigning his men to their various places for the day. Welders were getting electrodes and buttoning up their coats. The burners were working over their hoses, swearing graphically as they found frozen spots or as disputes arose about torches, generators, or wrenches. By the time the whistle had finished blowing, most of the men had left the room, whistling cheerfully, kidding each other and swearing at the cold.

The foremen gathered around the table. The telephone rang incessantly—a welder was wanted at the blow-

ing station, two of the riggers in the gang working on the open-hearth gas line had not come to work. The gang could not hoist the next section of pipe short-handed. Ivanov swore at the absentees, their mothers, and grandmothers. Then he went out to borrow two men from another gang. Kolya wrote out a list of the welders and what they were doing. He wrote it on newspaper. The ink was a semi-frozen slush. This list formed the basis on which the workers would get paid for the day's work. He thrust it into his pocket and went to the clean gas line to see how things were going. I took my mask and electrodes and started out for No. 3. On the way I met Shabkov, the ex-kulak; a great husky youth with a red face, a jovial voice, and two fingers missing from his left hand.

"Well, Jack, how goes it?" he said, slapping me on the back. My Russian was still pretty bad, but I could carry on a simple conversation and understood almost everything that was said.

"Badly," I said. "All our equipment freezes. The boys spend half their time warming their hands."

"Nichevo, that doesn't matter," said the disfranchised rigger's brigadier. "If you lived where I do, in a tent, you wouldn't think it so cold here."

"I know you guys have it tough," said Popov, who had joined us. "That's what you get for being kulaks."

Shabkov smiled broadly. "Listen, I don't want to go into a political discussion, but a lot of the people living down in the 'special' section of town are no more kulaks than you."

Popov laughed. "I wouldn't be surprised. Tell me, though. How did they decide who was to be dekulakized?"

"Ah," said Shabkov, "that's a hell of a question to ask a guy that's trying to expiate his crimes in honest labor. Just between the three of us, though, the poor peasants of the village get together in a meeting and decide: 'So-and-so has six horses; we couldn't very well get along without those in the collective farm; besides he hired a man last year to help on the harvest.' They notify the GPU, and there you are. So-and-so gets five years. They confiscate his property and give it to the new collective farm. Sometimes they ship the whole family out. When they came to ship us out, my brother got a rifle and fired several shots at the GPU officers. They fired back. My brother was killed. All of which, naturally, didn't make it any better for us. We all got five years, and in different places. I heard my father died in December, but I'm not sure."

Shabkov got out his canvas tobacco pouch and a roll of newspaper, and thrust both toward Popov. "Kulak smoke?" He smiled grimly.

Popov availed himself of the opportunity and rolled a cigarette.

"Da. A lot of things happen that we don't hear much about. But then, after all, look at what we're doing. In a few years now we'll be ahead of everybody industrially. We'll all have automobiles and there won't be any differentiation between kulaks and anybody else." Popov swept his arm dramatically in the direction of the towering blast furnace. Then he turned to Shabkov. "Are you literate?"

"Yes," said Shabkov, "I studied three years. I even learned a little algebra. But now, what the hell! Even if I were really well-educated, they wouldn't let me do any other work but this. What's the use of me studying? Anyhow, they won't even let me in to any but an elementary school. When I get home from work I want to raise my elbow and have a good time." Shabkov touched his throat with his index finger, to any Russian a symbol of getting drunk. We arrived at No. 3. Shabkov swung onto a ladder and disappeared up into the steel. Popov looked after him with wrinkled forehead. Shabkov was one of the best brigadiers in the whole outfit. He spared neither himself nor those under him, and he used his head. And yet he was a kulak, serving a sentence, living in a section of town under the surveillance of the GPU, a class enemy. . . . Popov didn't thoroughly understand it.

POPOV and I set about welding up a section of the bleeder pipe on the blast furnace. He gave me a break and took the outside for the first hour. Then we changed around. From the high scaffolding, nearly a hundred feet above the ground, I could see Kolya making the rounds of his thirty-odd welders, helping them when they were in trouble, swearing at them when they spent too much time warming their hands. People swore at Kolya a good deal too, because the scaffolds were unsafe or the wages bad. . . .

At about six o'clock a dozen or so young workers, men and women, gathered in the Red Corner with a couple of balalaikas and a guitar. Work was finished for the day, supper was on the stove, it was time for a song. And they sang! Workers' revolutionary songs, folk tunes, and the old Russian romantic lyrics. A Tartar worker sang a couple of his native songs. A young Ukrainian danced. The balalaikas were played very skillfully. I never ceased wondering at the high percentage of Russian workers who could play the balalaika. They learned during the long winter evenings in their village mud huts. . . .

Food conditions were the subject of constant discussion at spontaneous little meetings in the Red Corner at the barrack before or after dinner. There

1. Brigadier: A sort of straw boss in charge of a gang of eight or ten men and subordinate to the foreman.

was nearly always someone to explain the official position and the majority was usually satisfied.

"Just wait five or ten years and we won't need one single thing from the capitalist world," said Anya, a young woman welder. "Then we won't have to export food. We'll eat it all ourselves."

"In five or ten years there won't be any capitalist world," said a young rigger, waving his hand. "What do you think the workers in the capitalist world are doing? Do you think they are going to starve through another ten years of crisis, even supposing there is no war during that time? They won't stand it."

"Of course they won't. They'll revolt," said another. "And we'll help them when the time comes."

It was nearly seven o'clock when Kolya got home and stuck his nose into the Red Corner. "Jack, we must go if we're going to be on time." We went into our room to get our books. Kolya had already eaten supper at the technicians' dining-room down at the mill for which he had three cards.

We took our books, wrapped in newspaper, and started off for school.

Many people were leaving the barrack; some were going to the cinema, some to the club, but the packages of books wrapped in newspaper under the arms of most of them told of their destinations. They were going to school. Twenty-four men and women in the barrack were students in some organized school.

I attended the Komvuz. The course took three years and included Russian, arithmetic, political economy, Leninism, history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, history of the revolutionary movement of the West, party structure, and dialectic materialism. Most of the graduates of this school became professional propagandists or functionaries in the local political or administrative organizations. . . . I entered the Komvuz when I had been in Magnitogorsk only three months, in order to get some help in Russian. Then I became interested in the material of the courses. The history particularly was fascinating. Every experience in history was black or white, trends and tendencies were simplified. Every question had a perfectly definite answer. Not only that, the formulation of the answer must be thus and so. When you followed all the rules, everything made sense. It was a system built up like arithmetic. The only trouble with it was that often it did not always correspond to objective realities. . . .

Kolya attended the Technicum, a school with slightly higher academic standards than those of the Communist University. The entrance requirements were seven years of schooling and the applicants were weeded out

by competitive examination. The curriculum included algebra, physics, chemistry, mechanics, strength of materials, mechanical drawing and designing of structural steel, reinforced concrete and wooden structures, with emphasis on those types of construction needed for Magnitogorsk. Most of the teachers were engineers working in the designing office or on the job. They came to do their teaching after a day's work and were often tired and unprepared. The strain on the students was even greater, inasmuch as they studied four nights a week, whereas the teachers usually taught less. The student body was picked without regard to party affiliation. A komsomol, a non-party worker, was admitted on the same basis as a party member. "Class enemies" and members of their families, however, were rigorously excluded. Shabkov, whose father had been a kulak, could not enter the Technicum. This deprivation of rights of higher education to "lishentsi" (disfranchised citizens) was enforced till 1936, when a decree from Moscow granted equal educational rights to all. . . .

The tremendous investment made by the Soviet Union in education was necessitated by the lack of trained people in every conceivable field. The Revolution, civil war, and mass emigration of "old" elements left Russia in the early twenties even more illiteracy and fewer trained people than she had before the war. The increasing complexity of economic, commercial, and political life in the early thirties made it absolutely essential for the government to create a Soviet intelligentsia. This was the basic reason for the tremendous effort to educate and train which found expression in Magnitogorsk in the allocation, according to the general construction budget, of almost one hundred million roubles to the training of skilled workers. This sum was conceived and listed as capital investment just as was the similar sum spent on blast-furnace equipment.

THE necessity of training a Soviet intelligentsia had even more sweeping effects than the outlay of millions of roubles for education. The graduation of wages, the increased differential between the wages paid to skilled and unskilled, educated and uneducated, was largely an attempt to stimulate the desire to study. In doing this, the lethargy and traditional sluggishness of the Russian peasantry had to be overcome. The population, and in particular the peasants, had to be made to want to study. To some extent this desire was already present as a reaction to centuries of deprivation of educational opportunities and as a result of the natural curiosity of man. But additional stimulus was necessary.

If pay were the same for shepherd boy and engineer, most peasants would graze their flocks and never trouble about Newton and Descartes.

In 1933 wage differentials were approximately as follows: The average monthly wage of an unskilled worker in Magnitogorsk was something in the neighborhood of 100 roubles; a skilled worker's apprentice, 200; a skilled worker, 300; an engineer without experience, 400 to 500; with experience, 600 to 800; administrators, directors, etc., anywhere from 800 to 3000. This heavy differentiation, plus the absence of unemployment and the consequent assurance of being able without difficulty to get a job in any profession learned, supplemented, and stimulated the intellectual curiosity of the people. The two together were so potent that they created a student body in the Magnitogorsk night schools of 1933 willing to work eight, ten, even twelve hours on the job under severest conditions, and then come to school at night, sometimes on an empty stomach and, sitting on a backless wooden bench, in a room so cold that you could see your breath a yard ahead of you, study mathematics for four hours straight. Of course, the material was not always well learned. Preparation was insufficient, conditions were too bad. Nevertheless, Kolya, after having studied two years in the Technicum, could design a truss, calculate volumes, areas, and do many other things. Moreover, he knew from personal experience the concrete practical application of everything he had learned.

Kolya and I walked down the hill toward school. It was cold, the wind bit our cheeks, and within five minutes the moisture from our breath began to freeze on our eyebrows and eyelashes. We walked fast, as it was nearly seven o'clock.

"What do you have tonight?" I asked.

"Mechanics," Kolya answered.

"Did you do your problems?"

Kolya swore under his breath. "When the hell do you think I could have done them?"

We went on in silence. The Komvuz school building was a barrack very similar to the one in which we lived, except that it was cleaner and the rooms were larger. As we approached the door, we heard Natasha, the janitress, come out of her room with her cowbell in her hand, ringing it vigorously. Just in time. Kolya went on to the Technicum. I went into my classroom. . . .

We began with party structure. Before five minutes had passed the big riveter sitting in front of me was sound asleep with his chin on his collarbone. There had been some emergency work to do in his gang and he had had no sleep for forty-eight hours.

WHAT MAKES RUSSIA CLICK

THE Magnitogorsk I left in early 1938 was producing upward of five thousand tons of steel daily and large quantities of many other useful products. In spite of the purge, the town was still full of rough and earnest young Russians—working, studying, making mistakes and learning, reproducing to the tune of thirty-odd per thousand every year. They were also writing poetry, going to see remarkably good performances of "Othello," learning to play violins and tennis. All this out in the middle of a steppe where, ten years before, only a few hundred impoverished herders had lived.

During the next three years, while I stumbled in and out of Moscow, to Western Europe, the Balkans, the Near East, and Japan, following the star of journalism, I managed to keep in touch with Magnitogorsk. I arranged to see *The Magnitogorsk Worker* and other local publications, and from time to time I ran into old friends and acquaintances.

By and large, production increased from 1938 to 1941. By late 1938 the immediate negative effects of the purge had nearly disappeared. The industrial aggregates of Magnitogorsk were producing close to capacity, and every furnace, every mill, every worker, was being made to feel the pressure and tension which spread through every phase of Soviet life after Munich. "The capitalist attack on the Soviet Union, prepared for years, is about to take place . . ." boomed the Soviet press, the radio, schoolteachers, stump speakers, and party, trade-union, and komsomol functionaries, at countless meetings.

Russia's defense budget nearly doubled every year. Immense reserves of strategic materials, machines, fuels, foods, and spare parts were stored away. The Red Army increased in size from roughly two million in 1938 to six or seven million in the spring of 1941. Railroad and factory construction work in the Urals, in Central Asia, in Siberia, was pressed forward.

All these enterprises consumed the small but growing surplus which the Magnitogorsk workers had begun to get back in the form of bicycles, wrist watches, radio sets, and good sausage and other manufactured food products from 1935 till 1938.

In 1939 the stores in Magnitogorsk had no cigarettes, vodka was only occasionally available, shoes and suits had completely disappeared. By 1940 bread cards were reintroduced in spite of a law specifically forbidding them. Salt was not always available.

While consumption was drastically reduced, extraordinary measures were taken to increase the productive ef-

forts of the population. Speeches and propaganda were supplemented by severe labor legislation. A series of decrees made it a crime to come to work more than twenty minutes late. Offenders received up to six months at forced labor. It became illegal for a worker or other employee to leave his job without the written permission of his director, while on the other hand the commissariats were empowered to send any worker to any part of the Soviet Union for as long as the interests of production demanded, whether or not he wanted to go. At the same time a decree made factory directors, departmental chiefs, and chief engineers responsible before a criminal court for non-fulfillment of plan, failure of produce to come up to specifications, or juggling of the books in an attempt to pass off to other factories or consumers articles of poor quality. . . .

In Magnitogorsk, however, these nation-wide phenomena were supplemented by some specifically Ural developments. New factory buildings, not provided for by any of the plant projects, made their appearance. No one knew what they were for. . . .

As war spread over Western Europe the workers of Magnitogorsk and hundreds of other Soviet cities produced more while consuming less. It was necessary to prepare to fight and defeat the enemy. Who, specifically, the enemy was to be, no one knew. But production was increased notwithstanding.

By 1942 the Ural industrial district became the stronghold of Soviet resistance. Its mines, mills, and shops, its fields and forests are supplying the Red Army with the immense quantities of military materials of all kinds, spare parts, replacements, and other manufactured products necessary to keep Stalin's mechanized divisions in the field. . . .

Several times during the late twenties animated discussions arose in Moscow's highest political circles: Should the country concentrate on light or heavy industry? Should new factories be situated in the old industrial districts of the Ukraine and around Leningrad or in the Urals and Siberia? Stalin's opinion on these questions was clear and well grounded.

"Russia must overtake and surpass the most advanced capitalist countries in industry and military achievement within ten years or these capitalist countries will annihilate us," said Stalin in February, 1931. He further asserted that new industries must be concentrated in the Urals and Siberia thousands of miles away from the nearest frontiers, out of reach of any enemy bombers. Whole new industries must be created. Russia had hitherto been dependent on other countries for almost its entire supply

of rubber, chemicals, machine tools, tractors, and many other things. These commodities could and must be produced in the Soviet Union in order to ensure the technical and military independence of the country.

Bukharin and many other old Bolsheviks disagreed with Stalin. They held that light industries should be built first; the Soviet people should be furnished with consumers' goods before they embarked on a total industrialization program. Step by step, one after another these dissenting voices were silenced. Stalin won. Russia embarked on the most gigantic industrialization plan the world had ever seen. . . .

In Magnitogorsk this process went on in microcosm. Steel and equipment were brought in to the city, but often food, clothing, and other necessary supplies were forgotten or delayed. During the first year of my stay in the city butter was unheard of. Bread was issued in limited quantities according to a strict ration system. Meat was seldom obtainable. Thousands of gaunt workers shoveled and hammered with only black bread and occasionally cabbage or potatoes to eat; they died of typhus in winter, of malaria in summer. The construction work went on. In 1932 Magnitogorsk produced its first pig iron. Gradually conditions improved. Russian workers learned their jobs, became more efficient.

Today, after little more than a decade, Magnitogorsk stands one of the largest metallurgical plants in the world. It produces five thousand tons of pig iron, six to seven thousand tons of steel, more than ten thousand tons of iron ore every day, as well as millions of tons of chemical by-products, structural shapes, steel wire, rods, rails, plates, and strips annually. Furthermore, at the present moment, at least one armament factory previously situated near Leningrad has arrived in Magnitogorsk lock, stock, and barrel, complete with personnel, and is already going into production using Magnitogorsk steel.

MANY plants in Stalin's Ural stronghold I did not visit, but heard about. . . . In the extreme northern end of the Ural industrial district is Usolye, an old salt mine, whose production is now being used for the manufacture of various chemical products. Near this lies the famous Berezniki chemical center where fertilizers and explosives are manufactured.

Just north of Berezniki are the rich potash deposits of Solikamsk. Here an estimated deposit of eighteen billion tons of rich carnallite and silvinit is being worked; production in 1940 was more than two million tons. A plant situated near the city produced metallic magnesium so necessary for

the manufacture of incendiary bombs and shells.

A double-tracked railroad line connects these northern chemical centers with Kizel, a coal mining center which produced 3,600,000 tons in 1936. This coal is of inferior quality and can only be used in small proportions in the manufacture of coke. It is extremely useful, however, in the production of electric power. A local electric station of approximately one hundred thousand kilowatts supplies power for the Kizel-Sverdlovsk electric railroad.

South of Kizel an important ferrous alloy plant is situated at Chusovaya. Here iron is smelted with charcoal, thus guaranteeing high-grade steel for bearings and other working parts. A little more than a hundred miles west of Chusovaya the immense Perm aviation motor plant is situated. This vital factory was constructed in the early thirties and is thought to be the largest aviation motor plant in the Soviet Union. For years the district around Perm has been strictly guarded. No foreigners are allowed to look around it, while the Soviet workers in the plant are discouraged from traveling to centers where indiscreet remarks might give foreign observers indications as to the exact size and character of the Perm aviation motor plant. The Soviet Union guards well its military secrets.

A branch railroad running east from Chusovaya leads to the town of Krasnouralsk where a deposit of copper pyrite is being worked. A new copper smelter is in operation producing large quantities of high-quality pure copper—some of which, ironically, was exported to Germany during the two years of economic collaboration. Krasnouralsk also boasts a large sulphuric-acid plant.

About a hundred miles to the south is the immense railroad car plant at Nizhni Tagil. This plant has two large blast furnaces and an adequate open-hearth department for the production of iron steel necessary in the manufacture of some fifty thousand freight cars annually. Nearly forty thousand workers are employed in this enterprise.

The Urals are rich in non-ferrous metals. Chelyabinsk is a zinc-producing as well as a tractor and tank manufacturing center. Some nickel is produced at Kalilovo and also at Ufalet. Bauxite is mined and aluminum produced at a large modern plant at Kaminsk, while copper is turned out in quantities at Kyshtym. A few miles from Magnitogorsk an immense deposit of manganese was found and in 1934 mining was begun on a large scale. Today this manganese is used in blast furnaces all over the Soviet Union and exported as well. Copper and sulphur are produced from pyrites in Blvaya

One of the largest asbestos deposits in the world is located at Alpayevsk, where it is mined and shipped to the near-by town of Asbest to be processed.

The Ural industrial district is not entirely dependent on the Caucasian wells for oil. The largest single known petroleum deposit in the world is situated in and around Ishembayevo. A pipe line connects these oil fields with Ufa, where large cracking and refining units have been erected and put into operation. Here, in 1939, nearly three million tons of oil were produced. One difficulty with the Ufa petroleum is its sulphur content which runs up to three per cent and seriously complicates cracking and refining. In 1940 a high-octane gasoline plant was completed in Ufa for the manufacture of motor fuel for the Red air fleet. Its planned production was half a million tons annually and American engineers with whom I spoke, who had worked on the erection of the plant, told me that in their opinion it would produce nearly the planned amount of high-octane gasoline during the first year of production. Another high-octane gasoline plant was erected at Saratov on the Volga and is reported to have gone into operation early in 1941, though its capacity is not known.

BESIDES its oil industry, Ufa boasts one of the largest internal-combustion engine plants in the Soviet Union. Several times when passing through the town on the train, I saw the plant stretching mile after mile along the railroad. Its equipment is new and it is thought to produce tank and airplane motors.

The Ural industrial district is equipped with an immense electric power-producing network. The power plant in Magnitogorsk turns out more than one hundred thousand kilowatts annually, as does that in Sverdlovsk, while the plant in Nizhni Tagil is about half as powerful. Other plants are situated at Chelyabinsk, Berezniki, Perm, Zlatoust. Ural power production in 1934 was two billion kilowatt hours, and is estimated to have been doubled by 1940. These power plants are connected together in one network so that if, for some reason, one unit is forced to shut down, the industrial plants in its neighborhood will be supplied by other Ural power stations.

The Urals are equipped with a good railroad network. The recent completion of the Ufa-Magnitogorsk and the Akmolinsky lines and of the short but important Chelyabinsk-Kaminsk railroad have relieved traffic from the older railroads and made it possible to keep freight moving at a rate of speed well above the average for the Soviet Union. One of the most diffi-

cult problems which the Bolsheviks had to overcome in the operation of the immense Ural industrial region was coal supply. Originally, most of the coking coal was brought from the Kuzbas coal region in Central Siberia, a distance of nearly two thousand miles. The Kuzbas district has estimated reserves of four hundred and fifty billion tons of good quality coal—five times the reserves in the Donbas in the Ukraine. . . .

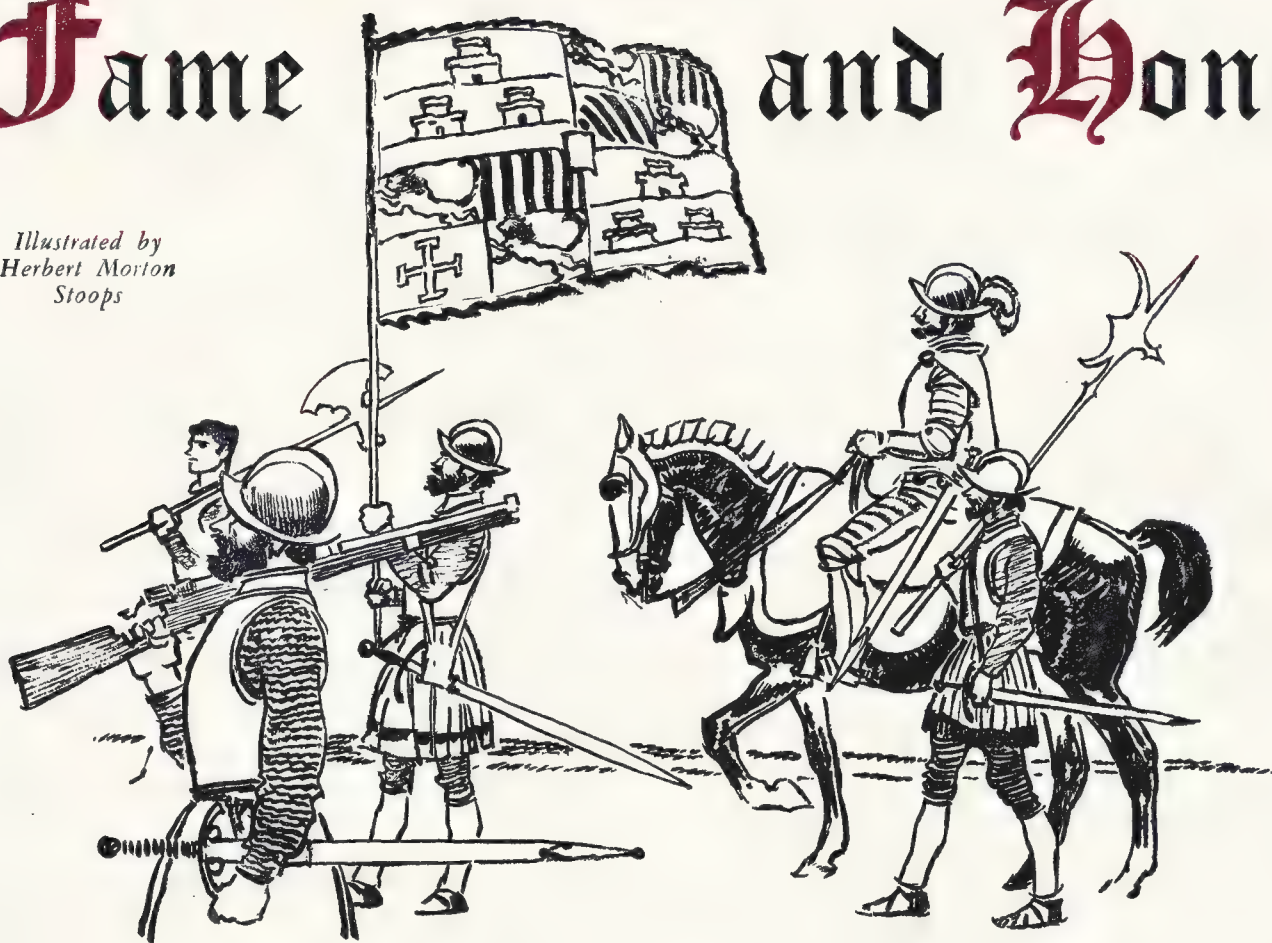
As I have indicated, the Ural industrial district produces all the basic raw materials for the manufacture of tanks, trucks, artillery, airplanes, and sundry military equipment. Two things were lacking: machinery and labor power. These have now been sent to the Urals in large quantities. I have seen several of the large aviation plants near Moscow. The new Tsagi plant near Otdykh on the Kazan railroad is an immense affair running mile after mile along the railroad. It was constructed near Moscow rather than elsewhere principally because of the fact that many of the highly qualified engineers, technicians, and skilled workers lived in and near the capital and were loath to leave. Living conditions in Moscow have been consistently better than in outlying places like the Urals or Siberia and the workers preferred to stay where they were. Moscow aviation plants operated to a large extent on materials from the Donbass and the Urals. Now they are being removed with their workers and technicians closer to their source of raw materials. Since the summer of 1940 labor legislation has made it possible for the government to send workers wherever it seems necessary and keep them there indefinitely. Furthermore, now that Moscow and its environs are coming into the sphere of military operations, there is no difficulty in getting people to move. Russia's east-and-west railroads are jammed with trains bringing reserves and supplies to the front. The same freight cars are carrying machines and workers eastward. Thus, while no figures will be available for some time, it is my opinion that large portions of the industrial machinery formerly located in areas now occupied by the Germans, instead of being captured by them are already in operation a thousand or more miles east of the present front, in the Urals.

Even if Moscow is lost, the Red armies will be able to go on fighting for months, even years, basing themselves on the stronghold of the Urals supplemented by factories and skilled workers evacuated from the western parts of the Soviet Union. All this sums up one basic reason why the Soviet Union has not suffered decisively as a result of Hitler's attack.

The second basic reason is the Soviet people.

Fame and Honor

Illustrated by
Herbert Morton
Stoops



"*WE came, in the lightnings of the Castle and the Lion, proud quarterings of Leon and Castile, astride this noble hemisphere our galleons had discovered. Ours the might of regal hand beating across continents, subduing savage nations with pitiless majesty, sinking iron into the soil of valley and hill and islet—the red of iron and the red of blood together mingled to eternity. Up, Castile! Thunder, Leon! Conquer gloriously, daring all things; go down to death when ye must, but go victorious in pride and honor deathless, taking salute of the celestial legions as ye blow across the winds between the worlds, triumphant unto this last!*"

OLID Gutierre de Carbajal, gnarled and meaty as a nut, sat feathering a crossbow quarrel and mouthing of what he had seen and been and known, which was plenty.

"The *Adelantado*? Our worthy captain who hopes to be another Colon, another Cortez? I knew him when first he came out from Spain, a starveling lawyer."

He cocked an eye at the splendid armored figure directing the work on the new ship now nearing completion—not a big ship, but still a ship, the *San Lucas* by name.

"And what is he now? Señor Don Lucas Vasques de Ayllon, by your

leave; judge of the high court of Hispaniola; upright, vastly wealthy, honored, a trifle potbellied; holder of the royal permission to found the first colony on the mainland of the New World! And here we be, God save us all, ready for fame and honor and fortune, gold and pearls, and mayhap loving lips as well. Eh, comrade Benito? I know how the pot boils."

Benito Martinez shook his head. "Don't speak aslant of Don Lucas, or lightly of my hopes. His niece is an angel."

"To be sure. And thank God that angels have lips."

Martinez grunted. He was twenty-five, and no lawyer. He had seen service in Yucatan and Cuba; he was firm and tight in the lips, wary in the eye, and had a hard, cruel, efficient cast of feature which made most men set him down as a tough customer.

And yet, when Benito Martinez spoke or smiled, women looked twice at him, and horses muzzled his hand, and even the savage slave-hounds ceased their growls to give him a thump of the tail and a kindly good day, as dogs do.

He and the veteran Carbajal were friends and intimates. Neither man was what he seemed. If Martinez, with his bold eye and defiant swagger, masked depths of boyish idealism and

tenderness, the rough oaths and cynic tongue of Carbajal concealed a penetrating shrewdness and almost frightening insight into people and things.

The gaze of Martinez strayed from the imposing figure of Don Lucas to the shore beyond. It was a warm day in the early summer of 1526, and this amazing scene was such as the continent of North America had never before witnessed, nor would soon again.

"The *Adelantado* is no person to gibe at, Carbajal," Martinez warned.

"God forbid! Why, I'd say it to his face!" exclaimed the other. "Don Lucas is the greatest man in all New Spain, commander of the noblest expedition, bar none, that ever sought the mainland! But he's not the man to kill forty thousand defenseless Indians in one day, as Cortez did."

"Plague take your dark meanings! He's a captain after my own desire!"

"Aye, more's the pity."

Benito Martinez frowned uncertainly. "What's your point, anyway? Prating of disaster? That's nonsense. This expedition is already crowned with success. We can't fail now!"

"So?" Carbajal squinted along his shaft. "And Cortez is a great captain; he killed forty thousand helpless men in one day, and fifteen thousand women and children the next day. I was there. That's success, lad, success!"

.....Gold and Pearls

Flags of Our Fathers—III



by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Everyone except God has forgotten those murdered *Indios*.

"I love your heart, my son. I love this noble leader of ours, who's put his wisdom and wealth into this high venture of colonizing the mainland. Now go take a walk through camp. When you see what I see, put on your hardest airs, balance bravado on your shoulder, and go pretend to Doña Isabella that you're a conquistador. I fear she'll see through your pretense, as do I and good Fray Antonio; but don't let the *Adelantado* see through it!"

Martinez laughed and rose. He pushed back his morion, tightened his sword-belt, and sauntered away. In this wide river-mouth under the southern lip of Cape Fear, six ships were moored, and on the shore was a seventh abuilding, from the ruins of one that lay wrecked.

AS he slowly approached the group surrounding the commander Don Lucas, his dark eyes flitted over everything in sight, trying to divine the cryptic meanings of Carbajal. Here were close to five hundred colonists, men and women, in an orderly camp along the shore; and there were, besides, eighty-nine horses and a full hundred African slaves. Hunters were out, and a party to scout some proper spot to erect the new colony. Mean-

time the little ship was building. The pride of Don Lucas must have the wrecked craft replaced at once.

They were not here on the unknown mainland by chance. Pressed by an inner ambition to rival the hardy men of the sword who had become conquistadors, the wealthy judge had twice sent out caravels to explore the shores north from Florida, before undertaking this greater venture.

It was now known that this new land was not Cathay nor India, as Colon had thought, but a vast continental mass whose limits no man could guess. Don Lucas was afire to colonize this mainland with some of the hordes of adventurers, runagates and rascals who had poured across the ocean from Spain. He had chosen this strip of coast, gained the royal approval and authority, and utilized his wealth generously to give the expedition everything which might insure its success. He had even brought his family, consisting of his niece Isabella, to share in the glorious venture; some said Doña Isabella had brought herself.

Martinez, before joining the *Adelantado*, passed with elaborate carelessness among the tents. Most of the women, free and slave, were working along the river-bank. One of these came back to the tents, bearing on her head a great bundle of washing. She

was not black but brown, with a proud carriage and features hideously ugly and age-drawn. This was Catarina, the Carib slave and attendant of Doña Isabella. The Caribs, who had peopled all the islands discovered by Colon, were now becoming a vanished race, due to slaughter and slavery.

The paths of Martinez and Catarina came together, by a marvelous chance. The Carib woman did not pause, but in passing uttered a few low words.

"At the bow of the new ship, well before moonrise."

Martinez nodded, left the tents, and approached the commander. As he came up, Don Lucas turned to him with joyous greeting. He loved this young, hard-eyed soldier and took him at face value; a deadly man with sword or pistol, as was well known, and therefore seldom asked to fight a duello.

A shrewdly able man of fifty, the *Adelantado's* dark features of Spanish pride were beaming. His armor was uncomfortable in the hot sun, but he would not discard it; a good lawyer, he loved to pose as a soldier and colonizer and figure of history, and was heavily conscious of his future fame. But he was a good and sturdy administrator.

"Ha, Benito! I've just recollected something!" he exclaimed. "Do you remember the Carib chief who was

burned at San Domingo for sorcery, last Michaelmas?"

"No, Excellency," replied Martinez. "How could I remember one among so many?"

"True; but this fellow was a chief," said Don Lucas. "I was not unkindly to him at his trial, and in return he prophesied that the greatest good fortune of my entire life would come on next St. Luke's day, which will be the eighteenth of October."

"He prophesied, therefore you burned him; yet you believe his prophecies!" Martinez smiled to ease the impact of his sardonic words.

THE *Adelantado* shrugged.

"Well, the meaning is evident! By October, our colony should be well established and great discoveries made within the new land; on St. Luke's day, the day of my patron saint, some glorious fortune will happen!"

"Accept my warmest congratulations, Excellency," Martinez rejoined. "By the way, I note that the black slaves working on the ship are getting heavy doses of the lash."

"They must be taught the worth of labor," said the other complacently, pursing up his rather heavy but undoubtedly imposing features.

"The keen legal mind of Your Excellency hits upon the exact point," Martinez rejoined. "The blacks know nothing about this kind of work; the carpenters teach them nothing; the overseers amuse themselves by whipping the wretches to death. As you suggest, it might be wiser to have them taught, than to kill them with the lash! Besides, they may be of use later."

Don Lucas pulled his long upper lip thoughtfully. "I agree; I shall send orders accordingly. And I should have a lieutenant to attend to such matters for me—"

Here, amid bursts of shouts and rejoicings, came news that a number of the hunters had brought in deer, others had made contact with the local Indians, and with the party was coming a messenger from those sent to find a site for the new colony. Everyone tumbled out to meet the arrivals, but Martinez sought where Carbajal sat in the shade, mending and feathering quarrels. He was not so curious as the others about the Indians, who had hitherto kept well away from the great camp of white men.

"So art back, eyes of iron and heart of gold!" The veteran gave him satiric greeting. "What's the commotion? I see Fray Antonio holding up his cassock and running."

"Fresh meat and Indians, and news from the party of scouts."

"So! You know, this Fray Antonio Montesino is an honest fellow, all for giving the *Indios* good treatment and not enslaving them. Behind the times,

I fear. Well, let others run at the news. Tell me what you saw in the camp?"

"Sick men. Black slaves, to till the fields. A ship building. The sun shining," he rejoined with sarcasm. "Women mending and washing garments at the shore. What about it?"

Carbajal grunted. "And you ask what about it! Slavery, in this new country where earth and air and water are free! A ship built upon this shore, where never before was any ship built! And a town, a colony, being founded in this unknown land of savages for the first time—"

"A truce to your dark hints. What's the point?"

"Look at the three men talking together, yonder by the horse herd. And why was Don Lucas clapping you on the back?"

Martinez told of the *Adelantado's* words, while he peered at the three men indicated.

This expedition was not composed of timorous souls. Rather was it filled with heady rufflers and adventurers, old soldiers, and many escaped fugitives; anyone who had used dirk or sword on his neighbor, had signed up. You could not throw a stone into the crowd without hitting a thief or murderer. Honest Don Lucas believed that the new colony would regenerate both men and women.

"St. Luke's Day, says he!" echoed Carbajal. "And the poor hidalgo actually prates of it to you! Well, it's like to be a true prophecy come October. What's the greatest good fortune of our captain's entire life? Why, certes, the moment of his death! What else?"

"Scold on, scold on," said Martinez. "Now let's have the point of your bilious gibes! Those three men are Perez, the notary; Juan Aguilar, the bravo; and Hernan de Pastillo, the blue-blooded gentleman adventurer. What of it?"

"Pastillo, handsomest man in Hispaniola, and singer of ballads to Dona Isabella!" mocked the veteran. "Those three well represent our company of sly schemers, assassins and broken gentry. Do you see nothing symbolic in our colony, our valiant new jewel in the crown of Spain, being founded by such as they?"

"Don't be absurd," Martinez said lazily. "There were but few honest men in the company that conquered Mexico!"

"But we had our Cortez, who could count his daily slaughter by the thousands! Keep your sword loose in the scabbard, my son; handsome Don Hernan de Pastillo isn't talking with bravo and notary just to pass the time of day. And a word in your ear! Me, I'm in this outfit for lack of money to be elsewhere. Why are you here? Whither bound?"

Martinez considered. "I came to the New World, a boy, to seek fortune. I've been buffeted, bullied, starved; I've learned to curl lip and throw curse at other men, fight if need be, and keep my head above water. That's all I've got to show for it. Whither bound? To be honest, I don't know. I'm not scoundrel enough to get ahead in the world. This venture offered great hopes; I signed on, and here I am."

"So—with that equipment, my son, you're in peril. You have two dangerous friends: One, that Carib woman, that slave who serves Doña Isabella."

"She's a poor thing, Carbajal, a slave, and old."

"She hates all white men with the venom of age and race and sex!"

"She doesn't hate me."

"Don't fool yourself; she hates all, you and her mistress together. And Doña Isabella, whom you yearn after—well, there lies sudden death! She's capable, not a sly cloistered wench; she has spirit, fire, ambition! She rules the *Adelantado*."

"A noble woman, Carbajal," said Martinez softly. The veteran gave him a sharp glance and nodded.

"Aye; noble. Why is she here, when she could have had the pick of any captain in the islands? Because she has the heart for a venture in new lands, beyond horizons. She can handle a weapon with any man, and can handle any man like a weapon. What can you offer her?"

"Hope," said Martinez. "And an honest heart. And the future as it's won."

"Fair enough; but keep an eye on that damned Carib witch, for witch she is! Answer me one question, and I'll have done. Is there anything in Doña Isabella you'd change if you could?"

"No!" said Martinez. "No! She's magnificent! Apt at times, perhaps, to hold herself a bit above common folk; that's her ancient blood and pride. Sweet, gentle, tender, yet strong as a man, with strength of heart and of spirit!"

"You've answered me," said Carbajal. "Now we talk no more in this wise; but my son, when the evil day comes and you curse the hour you were born, come to Carbajal and he'll help you look hell i' the eye and fear not! Now I must take stock of all weapons for the muster-roll. There's work for all ahead—work!"

HE went away with his tools, and Martinez did likewise. A grand comrade, thought Martinez, a doughty friend in a pinch; but there had been no pinches thus far. Too much inclined to look on the dark side of everyone. A bad habit, that.

Thus, for the present, Benito Martinez dismissed old Carbajal, and put



his mind to other matters—vitaly important ones, too. The moon, a trifle past the full, would be late in rising this night, and his lute needed restringing and tuning. . . .

Darkness came, and with his lute he sought the bow of the new ship, nestling in the warm sand beneath the ways at the edge of the shore. Thanks to its position, no one would be troubling him; the camp of the slaves, who were ironed at night, was at one side, and the main camp stretched far on the other side.

There was much singing of a night. The Africans sang low, mournful cadences; in the main camp lutes and guitars tinkled with joyful anticipation. By the ship, sweet-smelling of new pine from near-by woods, Martinez scooped a seat in the sand and fingered his lute softly in the starlight. He was frankly in love with Doña Isabella, and he thought she loved him in return; at least, free of Spanish conventions in her heart and in this savage environment, she had given him some reason to think as much.

His thoughts went to Don Lucas. Amazing as it seemed, the *Adelantado*

"On the wings of a kiss!" said he.

had not as yet appointed any lieutenant of the expedition. Martinez and others had served as such from time to time, but Don Lucas liked to keep the reins in his own hands. Now, at last, he must make definite appointment, and why not Benito Martinez? A word from Doña Isabella would settle the choice—

Before he was aware of them, two cloaked figures appeared in the starlight. The voice of the slave Catarina, though she spoke softly, carried to Martinez with a fleer of mockery:

"Here's the ship, mistress. It will be a coffin for him that builds it."

"Careful!" cautioned Doña Isabella. "You are speaking of my uncle, woman!"

"Aye, your worthy uncle, mistress. A coffin for him; yet neither coffin nor corpse will ever see Christian burial."

"Silence, fool! If anyone overhears your chatter, I can't save you from a whipping! Now remain here on watch."

Martinez was on his feet, his lute tinkling a gayly lilting welcome, a

touch of song on his lips. She came to him with a glad cry; as he took her in his arms, her cloak billowed out and enfolded them both.

"So Catarina thinks the ship looks like a coffin, eh?" he said, laughing.

"You know how she is, Benito. Because her own people think her gifted with second sight, she tries to impress me—but never mind that. Do you know we're leaving here in two days? The ship will be sufficiently finished then to be towed—"

"I know nothing. Here, sit down!"

"No; I can only stay for an instant." She was eager and abrupt; in the starlight her dark beauty was softened, but he could see that excitement seethed in her and blazed in her eyes. "My uncle wants you at once in his tent."

"More important to talk with you, *mi corazón*—"

She stopped his lips with her fingers. "Listen! A place for the colony has been found, less than a hundred miles south; a great river, well stocked with fish. The sick men, the women, go in the ships. The others will march along the coast."



"Good! And who commands this march?"

"My uncle, of course. Twenty horses and fifty men leave tomorrow, marching in advance; Pastillo commands them, you're his lieutenant. I arranged it all. No time now to tell you the details; Pastillo will do that. Benito, it's a magnificent chance! Trust me; fly now to my uncle's tent—"

"On the wings of a kiss!" said he, and she yielded. But her kisses were cold.

"Hurry!" she told him. "Hurry! Remember one thing: Be what you seem, whether you like it or not! Now go."

With a grimace, he complied. Lieutenant to Pastillo? No joy in that. He had not a bit of liking for Hernan de Pastillo, but the man was a good soldier, a steely fellow, ambitious. What did Isabella have in mind—whose interest? Pastillo was her open admirer, bearded, handsome, arrogant.

Pastillo was in the *Adelantado's* tent when Martinez strode in and took his

place among the other officers. Don Lucas was in the midst of a prosy lot of instructions about the feed of the horses, and the keeping of rust from armor, and the like; all mighty sensible, but old stuff to men who had sweated on campaigns instead of in the law courts. Handsome, hard of jaw, cold of eye was Don Hernan de Pastillo; he gave Martinez a cool nod and a smile. The two men understood one another and respected one another, and did not pretend friendship.

The rest were dismissed. Don Lucas looked at Pastillo and Martinez, smiled, preambled about the colony site, and got to business.

"*Caballeros*, make your own arrangements; get off early. The scouting party sends word they've made peaceful contact with the Indians, but these are a warlike race and are gathering in large numbers. They have an emperor. He is coming to meet and treat with us. We should have a strong party there to prevent any treachery on the part of these heathen;

but delay any treaty until I arrive in person to deal with their emperor."

"We've no guides," said Pastillo.

"You need none. Simply march down the shore. Francisco, the Indian guide and interpreter with the scouts, will come forth to meet you."

They talked a while further about this Francisco. He was an Indian who had been captured by one of the prior exploring parties; he had been converted, had been taken to Spain by Don Lucas, and his great stories about this land had set Spain by the ears. White Indians, gold and gems, giants and other wonders, figured in his fantastic tales.

WHEN Pastillo and Martinez walked out into the starlight together, the former paused and spoke quietly.

"Comrade, our personal ambitions may somewhat clash. Shall we lay them aside until later, and meanwhile serve for the common good?"

"Well said," replied Martinez. "Here's my hand on it!"

They shook hands, and separated. Pastillo was taking command of the twenty horsemen, and Martinez, of the foot.

Sunrise saw them up and making ready. Martinez had picked old Carbajal, but the veteran was a cavalier and would be with Pastillo's mounted company. As he was donning his armor, Martinez was aware of a shadow slipping in and out of the tent; it was Catarina the slave, who handed him a folded paper and was gone.

Opening the paper, he saw a single line of writing:

"Bring me the emperor's pearls, then ask what you will."

Martinez pressed his lips to it, and tucked it away. The emperor's pearls? Absurd, of course—yet, who could tell?

They got off at last, horsemen with pennoned lances, footmen with arquebus and crossbow, armor glinting gayly. Trumpets blew, drums rolled from the anchored ships, lusty cheers pealed; the three friars, who were left behind, blessed the departure. And so the long file of men and horses went, and the woods swallowed them up; they could follow the shore itself only at some distance, because of lagoons and rivers and indentations. During the weeks the ship had been building here, the near-by trails had been well learned.

So they made fast progress the first day, despite a late start. Marching under a summer sun with morion, breastplate, sword and arquebus or crossbow, not to mention munitions, food and blanket, was a man's job. The men kept up to it. For the most part, they were a hard lot; Pastillo seemed to have selected the worst hellions of the whole outfit. Yet such men, who gave no mercy either to themselves or others, had made New

Spain what it was. They were brutes with the stark ferocity of brutes, when it came to a pinch.

Twenty of the African slaves were brought along, as pack-animals. The lot of these black men, chained and loaded, was piteous: two of them died that first day under floggings; then Martinez eased the burdens of the others and things went better.

The second and the third day passed off well; Pastillo had the air of a proper soldier, kept all hands up to the mark, and made good time. Five days, he had figured, should end the march. Martinez saw his friend Carbajal only at night, and was too dog-tired to have any talk.

"I see," observed Carbajal, when they were stirring on the fourth morning, "you have the ex-bravo Juan Aguilar in your command. How does he make out?"

"Well enough. I think. Hadn't noticed him. Why?"

Carbajal shrugged. "Keep him in view. There's no end of talk going around concerning what's ahead. A pagan emperor, another Montezuma; pearls beyond price, gold as in Mexico. I smell something cooking, my son, and it's the same broth Cortez brewed, if I'm any judge, so be wary."

"Of what? Our orders are plain," said Martinez. "Make ready our own report on the site for the colony; encamp there; treat the *Indios* in friendly wise but make no treaty. Don Lucas will do that."

"I'm not speaking of orders from heaven, but from hell," said Carbajal, and departed laughing in his beard.

THAT morning Pastillo came riding back along the column. Seeing an arquebus-man limping on blistered feet, he turned his horse over to the man for the day, and amid the plaudits of the men, joined Martinez afoot. They were, this day, marching straight down the wide sandy beach, which was hard going at flood tide; but, when the tide was out, the wet sand was dry and hard and made good walking.

"We should meet Francisco and some of the others tonight or tomorrow," said Pastillo at Martinez' ear. "When we do, be ready for action. The messenger from the scouting party told me that these *Indios* have great pearls, their emperor greater than any. So hath Francisco said, likewise."

"Action? Of what sort?" queried Martinez. The other laughed softly.

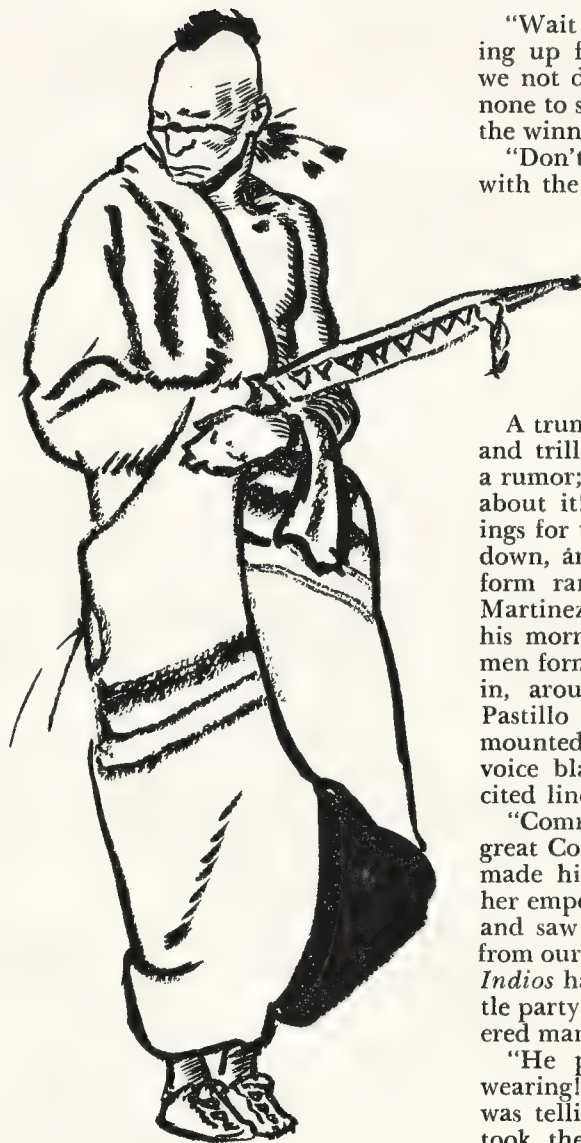
"Wait and see, *camerado!* Action to secure all this rich land to Spain."

"Indeed? Perhaps you're after the emperor's pearls yourself?"

Pastillo gave him a sidelong look. "And if I am, but not for myself?"

Martinez laughed. "Perhaps I am also, and not for myself!"

"Good! Then we're agreed; and afterward, you and I will settle about



"Wait and see," said Carbajal, rolling up for the night. "Why should we not do what Cortez did? There's none to stop us, and a vast country for the winning!"

"Don't be absurd. We're not at war with the Indians," snapped Martinez.

Despite the efforts of the friars to appease the Indians, redskins lurked in the woods.

A trumpet trilled with dawn, trilled and trilled again. "Dire news," flew a rumor; "eat and then form up, swift about it! The Captain has evil tidings for us all. Quick, quick!" Food down, arms to hand, packs made up, form ranks! Fever seized everyone. Martinez lost sight of Carbajal, gulped his morning wine, hurried to get his men formed up. Everyone was falling in, around the clump of cavaliers; Pastillo had the Indian Francisco mounted at his side, and now sent his voice blaring across the anxious, excited lines of men before him.

"Comrades! You all know how the great Cortez, by one audacious stroke, made himself master of Mexico and her emperor. Some of you were there and saw it. Now we have bad news from our scouts. The emperor of these *Indios* has resolved to destroy that little party of our comrades; he has gathered many savage warriors—"

"He profaned the crucifix I was wearing!" howled out Francisco. "I was telling him of the true God; he took the crucifix and broke it, and threw it into the fire!"

Exclamations of horror broke from the ranks. These men, inbred fanatic warriors by long generations of battle against Islam, were fired at once by this story. Cortez, thought Martinez, had availed himself of the same spur.

"Our comrades, our colony, all of us, have only one chance!" bellowed Pastillo, waving his bared sword. "We must attack these gathered heathen, slay them, teach them a lesson! And take their emperor prisoner if possible! We know how rich they all are in gold and pearls; let that be our reward for duty well done! Against powder and arms and horses, these naked heathen cannot stand. Come, then—march! Avenge the insult to our faith, prevent the treachery that would slaughter our comrades! Francisco will lead us upon them by roundabout trails. Forward, in God's name!"

AMID a burst of fierce shouts, the ranks of men following. Word spread that there were only a few miles to go. Enthusiasm spread through all ranks. Arquebuses were loaded, crossbow strings tested, quarrels made ready.

the pearls. Since all's understood, I'll have a word with one or two of the men."

Pastillo left him and marched with Juan Aguilar and two or three of the others. At the moment, Martinez saw nothing darkly sinister in all this; it was curious, true, and for an instant it occurred to him that Doña Isabel's promise might have been made to Pastillo as well as to him. He dismissed this possibility, however.

"Agreed, are we?" he reflected. "Somehow, Don Hernan misunderstood my words; let it pass, and avoid trouble."

Late in the afternoon, a smoke was sighted ahead. Two horsemen pushed on into the lead; toward sunset, there was a joyous meeting with Francisco and two of the scouts, and camp was made for the night by the shore.

This Francisco was a coppery rascal, ever smiling and fawning, anxious to please, and Martinez put no faith in his tall stories. Now he had nothing to say except to Pastillo; rumors got out that matters were in a grave situation ahead, but no one knew anything very definite.

Martinez pressed forward, caught sight of Carbajal, beckoned him.

"Give me your horse—quickly! I must have word with the captain!"

"Aye. More fool you; but go!"

The veteran swung down. Martinez leaped into the saddle and dashed ahead to where Pastillo rode in the vanguard, with the Indian Francisco. Treachery? He must be sure about this; Pastillo should have consulted him. Don Lucas was intent upon avoiding any clash with the Indians if possible—why, good God! This entire scheme might be a wild trumped-up plot of Pastillo's, a mad effort to make himself another Cortez!

GLANCING around, Pastillo caught sight of Martinez coming at the gallop, and drew his steed aside, waiting for him.

"What's this, Don Benito?" he exclaimed. "Anything wrong?"

"Not for the men to hear." Martinez drew rein. "Before attacking these *Indios*, what proof have you that they mean treachery?" he demanded softly. "You know our orders—"

"Francisco's story is proof enough. You heard him—"

"Bosh! The rogue's a witless liar, telling whatever will please his masters—why, devil take it!" cried Martinez suddenly. "This was what you meant yesterday! You've had this in mind all along!"

Pastillo leaned over, a dark fury in his eyes.

"Listen, fool!" he rasped out. "I promised Doña Isabella the pearls from the body of this emperor. Do you understand? We planned this together, she and I; here's fame, wealth, all to be had at one stroke, and the country won as that old ass Don Lucas will never win it! Think you I will let you spoil such great things?"

"She planned it—with you?" gasped Martinez. "This deviltry, this slaughter of poor naked *Indios*—"

"And you first, here and now, if you object." And Pastillo's dagger slid out; he leaned over, ready for the thrust, his eyes flaming. "Yes or no? The men are in no mood to be checked, fool. Nor am I! Do you obey?"

"Yes," said Martinez, choking on the word. "Yes."

Pastillo put up his stiletto. "Then get back and join your men, and see that you obey the orders you get!" he snapped arrogantly.

Martinez obeyed. He was white to the lips when he dismounted beside Carbajal. The latter scrambled into the saddle again, and leaned over.

"Quiet, my son, quiet," he said gravely. "I saw it coming, but would you have believed me? Not you. Now keep your eye on that rogue Juan Aguilar; if he's not been paid to dirk

you at the first chance, may the devil have me! And don't lose your head."

Carbajal cantered off. Martinez gained the head of his own column again and, with a wave of his hand to the men, resumed his place. Two of the African slaves, unable to keep up the pace, were calmly butchered by the men guarding them. Martinez said nothing.

He accepted everything now in a numbed horror of despair. What hit him hardest was not the ghastly treachery, nor the evidence of long and careful scheming, but the fact that Doña Isabella was in the plot. Her own words to him, her very note to him, proved it.

He marched on, a mechanical figure, oblivious to all around. Luckily things had not gone too far between them; he could realize the truth, he was not bewitched by her beauty into complete blindness. A fool might cry that it could not be; he knew it could be, and was.

A thousand little things flitted across his mind—words, gestures, actions—to

drive home the conviction, and harrow him with their finality. Carbajal had seen something of this sort, this thirst for place and power in the girl, but had only hinted around it. Martinez himself had seen or noted many tiny things. . . .

He squared his shoulders, flung into step with his men, and forced this out of his brain. Here was cold horror to take its place; treachery, grim pitiless slaughter, the sort of thing he had sworn nothing could force him into sharing. And now he was in it, snared. One word to stop it, and he would be murdered, or else thrown into chains on false charges. He looked around and saw the bravo, Juan Aguilar, singing a marching song and pretending that his crossbow was a lute, while the men around him laughed gayly.

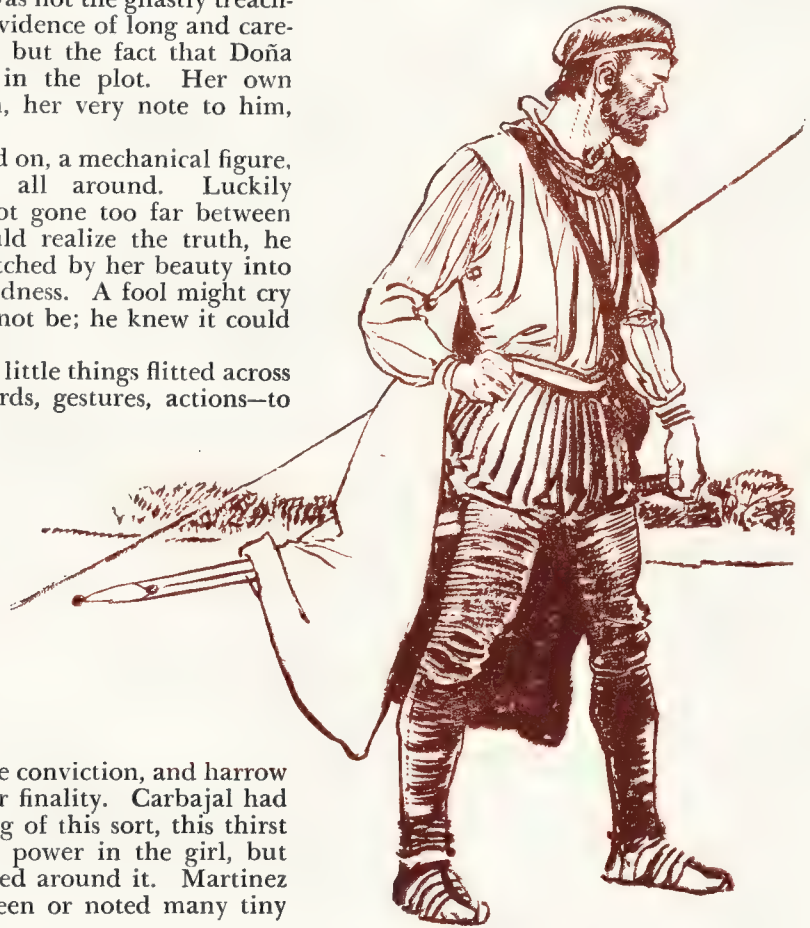
Martinez laughed, too, and flung a jest at the man; sweat gathered under his morion, as he caught hot words from the men behind. He had seen this sort of thing in his Mexican campaigns, though Cortez had been before his time, and he knew what lay ahead.

He was right.

The Indians knew they were coming, and supposed them coming in peace. There was a cluster of hastily erected bark shelters on a hillock

among the trees; the horsemen struck it in the rear, the others frontally. The roars of the arquebus-throats, the rolling powder-smoke, the glint of sword and armor, suddenly burst upon the place.

Some hundreds of natives had gathered. There was, indeed, an emperor—rather, a high chief; and he wore a collar of pearls. So did most of the other warriors. Once the



slaughter began, the unfortunate red men fought savagely, but chipped flint was no match for lead and steel. Some burst through the cordon and escaped; a few whites were brought down and stabbed to death; the rest was a mad fury of pursuit and killing among the bark structures.

Not all, however; there was one exception. In the largest structure, probably intended for a council-house, Pastillo and one or two other men vanished amid shouts and whoops. Here the "emperor" and a few of his men were making a last stand. And here, when the work was done, Pastillo exultantly looted the pearls of the dead chieftain—and looked up to see Martinez, unstained sword in hand, standing inside the entrance. He laughed and waved the strands of pearls.

"So you lose, *camerado*!" he cried.

Martinez glanced around. One of the soldiers with Pastillo had been



Martinez grunted. He was tearing a sleeve from his shirt, wherewith to stop the blood from two slashes in arm and shoulder. Carbajal came to help him finish the work; then they looked down at the fallen Pastillo, who lay with his head lolling sideways, but his fading eyes still alive. Carbajal nodded sagely at him, noting the blood welling from under his corselet.

"Smile, Captain, smile! It won't hurt, after a bit."

Pastillo vented an oath, his gaze gripping Martinez.

"Your colony founded in blood and treachery, the natives crying for vengeance—aye, you may well ask to what good!" Martinez shrugged.

"Fool! You won nothing!" he panted viciously. "She's mine, d'you understand, mine! She was playing with you—"

His head jerked and his grimace relaxed. Carbajal had been right about the hurt.

Stiffly, Martinez turned and picked up the pearl collar of the "emperor," looked at the bloodstained strands, and tucked it out of sight.

"I think he was both right and wrong," he observed thoughtfully. "True, I've won nothing. On the other hand, I doubt if she was playing with me. More like, she loved me a little and was only playing with him. Worse luck!"

Carbajal, for once, nodded approval.

FOUR days later, Don Lucas Vasques de Ayllon arrived overland, leaving the ships still detained by adverse winds. The *Adelantado*, in his bravest array and with drums and trumpets nobly at work, unfurled the great banner of Spain just below the hillock where so many Indians had died; and, with all the parade and pomp obtainable in the absence of the ships, took possession of this land for the King of Spain, pronouncing the royal colony of San Miguel de Guadalupe duly founded.

Then, in distress and dismay for what had passed before he came, the

stabbed in the throat and was dying. The other was stripping the slain and hurt Indians, his stiletto persuading those not yet dead to give up their pearls. This other was Juan Aguilar.

"Well met, well met!" Martinez held up one arm, touching the torn cloth below his corselet. "Twice today a crossbow bolt barely missed me; now we have the assassin and his master together! Fine gentleman and bravo, looting their naked conquest!"

Through the central hole in the roof, the noonday sun struck down upon the dead and dying and alive. Here was silence, the two men staring wild-eyed at the one. Outside rose voices of fury; then came a fresh outburst, as a number of Indian women were discovered. But none intruded into this deathly council-house.

Martinez stepped forward, warily.

"Fool!" broke out Pastillo then. "I warned you this morning, gutter-rat—Take him, Juan!"

His reddened rapier lifted to meet that of Martinez; he parried, stood on

defense, dropped the pearl collar to seize out his dagger. The steel crossed, clicked, engaged. At one side, Aguilar slipped around until he was behind Martinez. His sword flashed up and he made a deadly lunge forward.

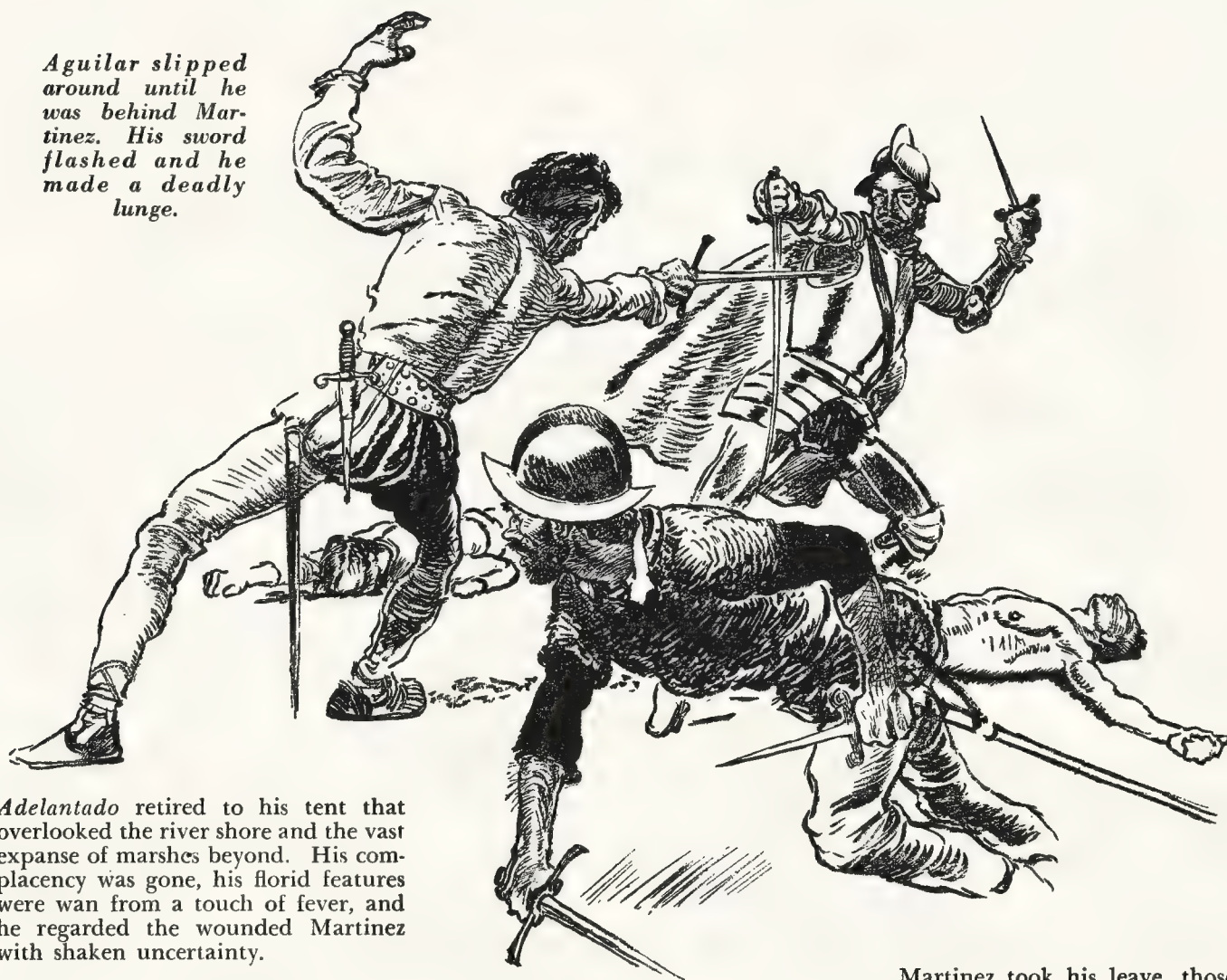
A crossbow twanged at the entrance. Aguilar and his lunge ended together; he pitched down across the dead "emperor" with a bolt through his throat. "Thanks, old friend!" said Martinez.

"What, Don Hernan? No more assassins? No chance to run for it, escape cut off? Why, then fight! Here's better sword-work than naked Indians—"

Pastillo fought; none could have done better. Twice Benito Martinez looked death in the eye; until, with panting gasp, Don Hernan collapsed. Then, presently, old Carbajal strode into the place and pulled his quarrel from the throat of Aguilar.

"Were this left here, some might not believe an Indian had done it," he said grimly. "What, Captain, not dead? Nor you, comrade? Truly, it was a noble bit of sword-play—"

Aguilar slipped around until he was behind Martinez. His sword flashed and he made a deadly lunge.



Adelantado retired to his tent that overlooked the river shore and the vast expanse of marshes beyond. His complacency was gone, his florid features were wan from a touch of fever, and he regarded the wounded Martinez with shaken uncertainty.

"BUT this is disastrous!" he exclaimed. "I gave orders, orders!"

"And the command to Don Hernan de Pastillo, not to me," said Martinez coldly. "I protested, and he threatened to have me shot on the spot."

"To what good?" cried the distracted *Adelantado*. "He is dead, and half a dozen men with him; scores of Indians dead, a few pearls obtained, a few women enslaved—"

"Honor blackened, your colony founded in blood and treachery, the natives crying for vengeance—aye, you may well ask to what good!" Martinez shrugged. "Well, Excellency, repair the damage if you can, while the colony is building."

"You appear to accuse me!" exclaimed the unhappy lawyer.

"Not I, Excellency; yonder is your accuser." Martinez pointed to the flag, standing out in the breeze in its brave colors. "There flies Spain—the golden castles of Castile, the scarlet lions of Leon. What does that banner say? It tells of centuries of fighting against oppression, against the Moslem; it recounts such a struggle for freedom as the world never knew!"

"Aye, a glorious struggle!" said the *Adelantado*, kindling. "The noblest flag in all the world, the flag of liberty and honor!"

Martinez smiled thinly. "So it is, indeed. Now it stands for slaves, black men in chains, Indians enslaved, human beings slaughtered wholesale; is such a memory of it, such a tradition, to go down to posterity in this New World?"

Don Lucas colored.

"Such words, Benito Martinez, might well bring you to trial, yourself in chains!" he began severely. Then his tone changed. "I am weary; my bones hurt. After all, you speak the truth. Yes, our grandchildren here in the city of San Miguel must not have such a tradition handed down to them. What can we do?"

"Wash out blood in work," said Martinez. "Impose strict discipline. Send out gifts to the Indians, make payment for the wrong done them, win them back. Establish justice! Hold the noblest and most chivalric things for which that flag of ours stands, before the eyes of all men! It can be done, Excellency!"

"Yes, yes." Don Lucas pulled at his lip and nodded. "Very good advice. It shall be done. What a pity that things went so amiss! What a pity that this emperor was killed, instead of being captured and treated as a guest among us—"

Martinez took his leave, those last words leaving a sharp stab in his heart. Was it possible that Don Lucas had been a secret party to Pastillo's enterprise—ready to praise had it succeeded, now censuring and bemoaning the fact of failure?

"Be damned to all lawyers!" he said to Carbajal that night.

The veteran only grinned.

Three days later arrived the ships, with the women and the sick. Already the air was filled with the sound of carpentry. Houses were rising, barracks and fort were marked out; the first work was to get cannon ashore from the ships, and emplaced.

NEXT day Martinez requested an interview with Doña Isabella. She received him in the *Adelantado's* tent, while Don Lucas was inspecting the gun emplacements. Her dark beauty was all alive with eagerness; what he read in her eyes would have set any man afire; but the depths in Martinez had turned cold. He bowed to her, gloomily, and took out the collar of pearls. She clapped her hands.

"Benito! You got it! For me!"

"Aye, Doña Isabella, for you," he said, and laid it in her hands. Her gaze devoured the pearls, then lifted to the chill graven stone of his face. She broke into a radiant smile.

"They could stand cleaning; but here, Benito, clasp them about my neck! You shall have a kiss, as earnest to my promise—"

Her voice died under his bitter look. "A kiss?" he repeated. "No, lady; that kiss is far away. . . . Yes, they may well need cleaning. From the throat of the Indian emperor, still stained with his blood. Fruit of treachery, betrayal, slaughter, dishonor; for you, Doña Isabella! Make the most of it."

He bowed, turned, and walked out of the tent, deaf to the quick appeal she hurled after him.

That afternoon things happened suddenly. Screeching painted redskins appeared everywhere; hunting parties were cut off, arrows poured into the camp, men bringing in timber were riddled. The roar of arquebus and cannon resounded along the shore, the *Adelantado* bestirred himself bravely, the attack was easily beaten off. However, midway of the confusion, part of the African slaves took to their heels, chains and all; most of them reached the forest safely.

DON LUCAS summoned Martinez that evening.

"If you have any letters for San Domingo, get them ready," he said. "I'm sending one of the ships home tomorrow for more slaves and supplies. And, in the morning, I shall write out your commission as my lieutenant; does it please you?"

"No, Excellency. Instead, send me back on the ship, for this colony of San Miguel is accursed," said Martinez boldly. "The flag of Spain has gained no honor here; the chivalry, the justice, the courage of the Castles and the Lions, are shamed and soiled with blood."

Don Lucas purpled with anger.

"Impudence insufferable, close to treason!" he burst out; then he leaned back wearily in his chair. "No, no; why should I punish you? It will be punishment enough to send you away from here, deprive you of any share in this great and glorious achievement—"

So, when one of the caravels winged way down the coast for Cuba and Hispaniola, Martinez was aboard her.

The summer weeks wasted into autumn; but already the fitful fingers of malarial fever were stealing up from those long marshlands to enfold San Miguel de Guadalupe.

The buildings went up, the ground was tilled and planted; and yet, despite all the efforts of the three friars to appease the Indians, redskins lurked in the woods to kill anyone beyond gunshot of the fort. The African slaves revolted, fired the houses, and escaped into the woods. Don Lucas, a wasting shadow, took to his bed.

Now it seemed that hatred and fury sprang out of the very soil. Dissensions sprang up; bitter fighting over

women and loot and power began. On St. Luke's Day the *Adelantado* did indeed gain the greatest good fortune of his life, as had been predicted; but he was not laid to rest beneath the earth. Instead, his remains were put aboard the new-built little ship, which had never been completed. It was evident that what remained of the colony must go back to San Domingo.

AMID bitter blasts of a howling wintry gale, they straggled aboard the ships. Barely a hundred and fifty feeble souls clawed aboard and heaved up the anchors. The *Santa Catalina* took in tow the boat holding the honored remains of Don Lucas.

The curse, if curse there were, had not yet run its course. For the little ship broke its tow, and so went the *Adelantado*, as the old chronicler says, "into the sepulcher of the ocean-sea, where have been and shall be put other captains and governors."

"So that Carib slave-woman foretold," observed Martinez. "What became of her?"

Grizzled Carbajal, himself more gaunt than ever with fever, wiped his mustaches. The ships had staggered in this day, Martinez had met him, and he was telling the sorry tale.

"That damned witch? She ran off

into the woods; I think she turned the blacks loose," he said. "I told you she hated us all! Well, we came away and left the big flag flying. I had a touch of fever and forgot it."

"So the great venture is ended! And the flag still flies there, or whips to fragments in the wind," said Martinez. "Well, it'll give this mainland of the New World a tradition of the noblest, to wipe out the shame of the human hands that planted it."

"Bosh!" said Carbajal, after a gulp of wine. "Bosh! That colony might have succeeded, if it had had just one real man, a man like Cortez, who could kill his forty thousand in one day and sleep soundly on it! We had one such, but he fell short of the mark; a better man killed him."

Martinez nodded. "Right," he assented. "After all, the venture was very close to success, as it's judged. Very close indeed, old friend. Barely a kiss away!"

He smiled slowly, and Carbajal winked at him and grinned. They understood one another, those two. What feats of arms and fortune they went on to in later years, has not been told; it is not likely that either of them attained success, however. Neither wisdom nor idealism always wins success, in this world's eye.



*His voice was bitter:
"Fruit of treachery, be-
trayal, slaughter; for
you! Make the most of
it."*

"Diamonds from Canada," which follows the banner of France to the New World, will carry on this "Flags of Our Fathers" series in our forthcoming November Issue.

Perhaps he'd got additional American iron in his blood; anyhow, he showed plenty of it, fighting on the Field of Blackbirds, back home in Jugoslavia.

by R. V. GERY

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

UP there in Belgrade, storied city by the Danube, they don't say much about this business. They have other things to occupy them, they'll maintain, such as working out the blueprints for a benevolent New Order in those parts, for example; and if a couple of armored divisions or so, plus storm-troops and dive-bombers, have passed through hell-for-leather, headed south, well, what of it anyway? It is only those pestilential, dumbhead Serbs again—another of the crazy outfits that haven't enough sense to lie still and get their teeth kicked in decently and in the good old German way.

That's what they'll say up in Belgrade, the Gauleiters and Kommandants and so forth; but what they think is another matter, to be sure. What is going on just at present, down there in the Kossovoplye, the Field of Blackbirds, is just a large pain in the neck to them. As evidence of their feelings, only mention the simple word *chetnik* in their hearing, and see what happens.

Even at that, though, they don't know the half of it. They haven't got the full details yet, about the man on the horse. When they do, there is likely to be some tall cursing—for the *Herrenvolk* are a superstitious, spook-ridden bunch by nature, and also they have, after their careful fashion, read up on the past history of these Balkans. They'll know very well just what that man on the horse might have been.

Who, rather—for there is quite a definite party supposed to be around, somewhere in the South Serbian hills there. Full five hundred years they say he has been in those parts, and that alone is enough to give Hitler's boys the chill-willies. No, they won't like that odd personality at all.

Because he is odd, all right—not getting away from that. Little Ilya Petrov, of course, knows he's a real man and solid, and so does Dr. Stepán Andreyev, tugging at his curly black beard. But the others—the *chetniks*, the *heiducs*, the fool bunch who don't know when they're dead—by their secret campfires in the Field of Blackbirds, have got quite another tale about this Marko Dragovic. They say

his real monicker is Marko, yes, but not Dragovic. Not ever Dragovic, they assert hoarsely, with rolling eyeballs and many a reverberating Serbian oath. They say he's somebody else altogether.

The funny part about it is, they're dead right. He is somebody else—neither more nor less than Mike Drucker, steel-worker of Pittsburgh, Pa., American citizen; and what he is doing, riding horses around, up there in the Kossovoplye, is just one of those things.

To begin with, there was the *gusli*. Now, a *gusli* is an instrument of more or less music, a species of one-string guitar, to which certain songs are sung by excitable gentlemen with high, wailing tenor voices, and in the ancient tongue of the Serb. Very high-octane stuff that is, and to be fully appreciated it should be listened to over another high-octane product—to wit *slivovitz*, the knock-you-dead plum brandy of the hills.

Oddly, that is just how Mike Drucker did hear it, one evening in Pittsburgh awhile back. He was in a place, having one or two or three—possessing

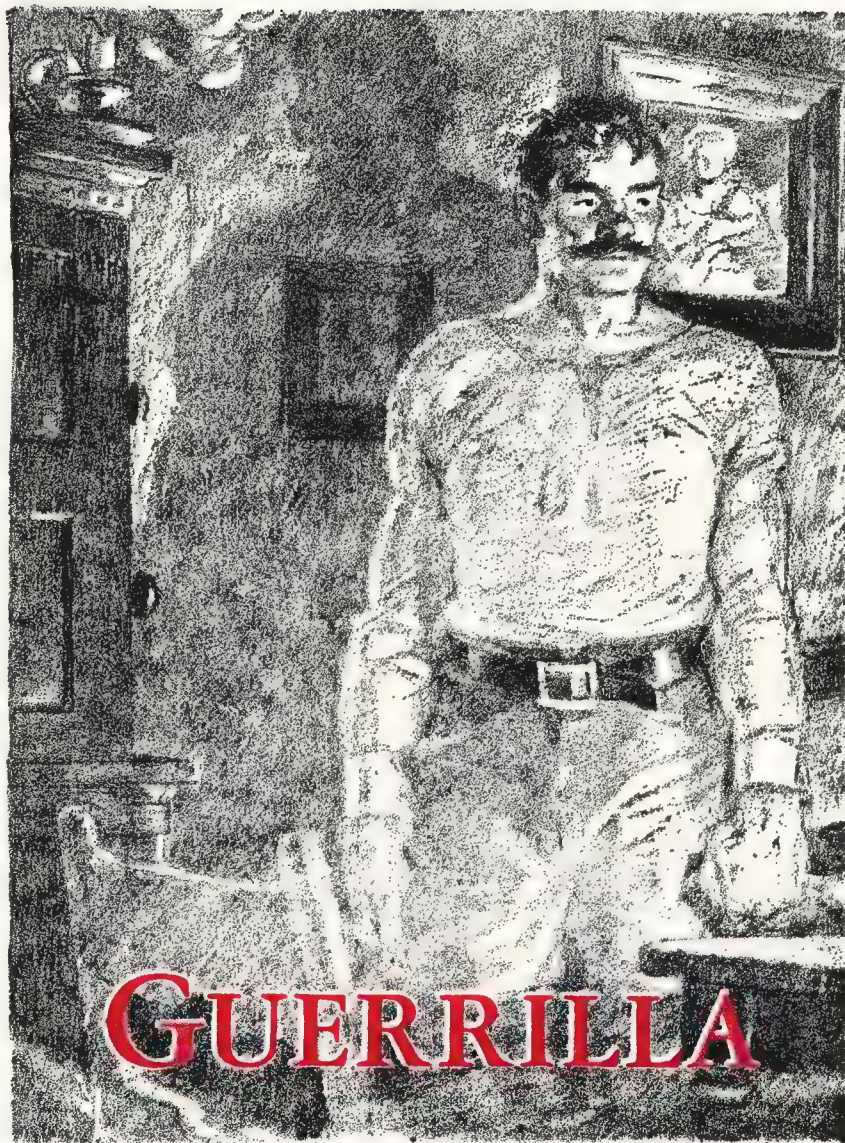
a noble Serb thirst still, for all his U.S.A. citizenship—when the *guslari* suddenly cut loose in the back room there. Mike pricked up his ears.

"Hey!" he exclaimed. "Will ya get a load of that, eh? Thought all them guys was dead long ago, by damn!"

He was tremendously proud of his Americanism, this Mike Drucker—born Marko Dragovic—although his appearance gave him away every time. The craggy head, the deep-set coal-of-fire eye, the drooping, luxuriant mustache, set him down for what he was; second-generation Serb, not yet completely assimilated into the American scenery. He was just thirty.

He picked up his glass and moved toward the door, still listening. "Can ya beat it?" he continued.

FOR what he was hearing was most uncommon to be heard, in any Pittsburgh speak' whatever. In private houses, maybe, behind closed doors, it was chanted still now and again—the Song of Kosovo, of the Field of Blackbirds, of that terrible and bloody defeat and massacre by the Turks in the fourteenth century that has colored





from PITTSBURGH

Serbian history and legend ever since. A come-back song, a defiance to the whole world—but rather too full of dynamite to make its public rendition outside Serbia either advisable or safe.

As in this instance—for there were some Bulgarian iron-men in that joint, and the Bulgars fought on the Turkish side at Kosovo, and the song has some passages in it that aren't nice about that, and— Well, there was abruptly strife thereabouts. Shoutings, smashed glass, spilled liquor, all the makings of a pleasant little Balkan get-together, until—just as the long knives began to flicker—the blue-clad cops came in and broke it up.

A swell, exhilarating ruckus, the combatants admitted; but it was too bad, they said, about Mike Drucker. For Mike had stopped one—a downward smash with a bottle that would probably have felled a healthy rhinoceros, and would have crumpled any normal human skull like an egg. But the Serb cranium is a specialized piece of hardware, and when they picked Mike up and took him to the hospital, he was still a long, long way from being dead.

When he came to, though, it was noticeable right away that there were distinctly queer things about him.

IN the first place, he was insisting furiously that he wasn't Mike Drucker at all, but Marko Dragovic—strictly true, of course, but odd for anyone so full of the Stars and Stripes as Mike. Then again, he spoke Serbian most of the time, to the great bafflement of his nurses and visitors. And finally, when they let him out as cured, he—just vanished.

One day he was still around Pittsburgh's smoky streets, a gaunt, lantern-jawed party with a strapped head—and the next day he just wasn't. He had drawn all his savings out of the bank, it was established, purchased himself a yellow suitcase and a railroad ticket to New York, and gone. Pittsburgh has not clapped eyes on him since.

Now Mike—or rather Marko's—actions after that are strictly wacky, by any process of reasoning. There isn't any getting around the fact that that spectacular wallop had done things to him, though it depends on the viewpoint whether they admit of any ex-

planation or not. The first thing he did, right after he landed in Manhattan, was to start sniffing around for the Yugoslav consulate.

Naturally, he didn't find any, for all this was some three months after the boys in Belgrade had published the obituary notice of that state. But finally he did dig up somebody who had been on the staff there, and asked advice.

He didn't get much, though. "You're crazy," the ex-official said in substance. "What d'you think all this business is—a picnic?"

Mike didn't know, or care. He hadn't, in truth, given this little affair of ways and means any particular attention—figuring, probably, that all such minor matters would settle themselves. He grinned, shuffled his feet.

"I shall go," he informed the official. "There is a call upon me."

Well, the man shrugged, and mentioned Bellevue, but Mike didn't know anything about that. He wandered around New York for a bit, muttering—and then, out of the blue as it were, the idea came to him. It was as he was standing in front of a window on

Fifth Avenue, looking at a big illuminated world-map in there, and he was so astonished he dropped back into Pittsburghese in spite of himself.

"Well, whaddya know?" he gasped.

With that, he hastened across the bridge into Brooklyn. From there on his career is frankly cockeyed. Probably it couldn't have happened to anybody but a slap-happy Serbian, in the goofy and improbable year of 1941; but Marko Dragovic, erstwhile Mike Drucker, American citizen, crashed an entire war single-handed, just to get where he wanted. Of course, the *chetniks* wouldn't think there was anything strange about it. To them it would be a most natural thing that this particular Marko should come a-jumping seas and oceans and armies.

FOR that is what Marko Dragovic did. He started by signing on a freighter in Brooklyn there—trimming coal. No difficulty about that, though they did look him up and down a bit.

"Special trip, chum," they said. "Dangerous, kind of."

Marko merely grinned again, flexing huge biceps, and said "*Hvala liepa!*" which means thankye and so forth. "I go down now, eh?" So he fell to work in the stokehold, and that was hotter than any steel-mill, because the freighter, a lease-lend vessel, waddled down across the Equator, and round Good Hope, and through the Red Sea to Suez. By the time he got there—in the middle of an Axis air-raid—Marko had learned about sweating.

But he hadn't learned sense, it appeared, as was proved by his quite coolly jumping ship in Suez. Observe, he had neither papers nor standing, save his seaman's card and his proof of citizenship in a belt about his middle, and with ash-stained dungarees, the thick mustache and a sort of flicker in his eye, he must have been a suspicious-looking party. But they had other things to worry about, just then along the canal—and so he made Port Said, again in the coal business, shoveling on a lighter. And there, of course, he ought to have been brought up with a round turn, the only apparent way across the Mediterranean being in a bomber, most definitely on business.

But, there was still a thin trickle of commerce running to Alexandretta up the Syrian coast, and from there on there were adventurous Greek *caïques*. Marko stowed away on the first kind, and hadn't any difficulty with the second, its skippers being ravenously short-handed. And the upshot was, after some weeks of ducking and dodging Axis men-of-war, he saw mountains filling all the northern horizon, and somebody told him they were Greece.

Marko, however, wasn't listening. He was crouched at the *caïque's* rail, staring with all his eyes.

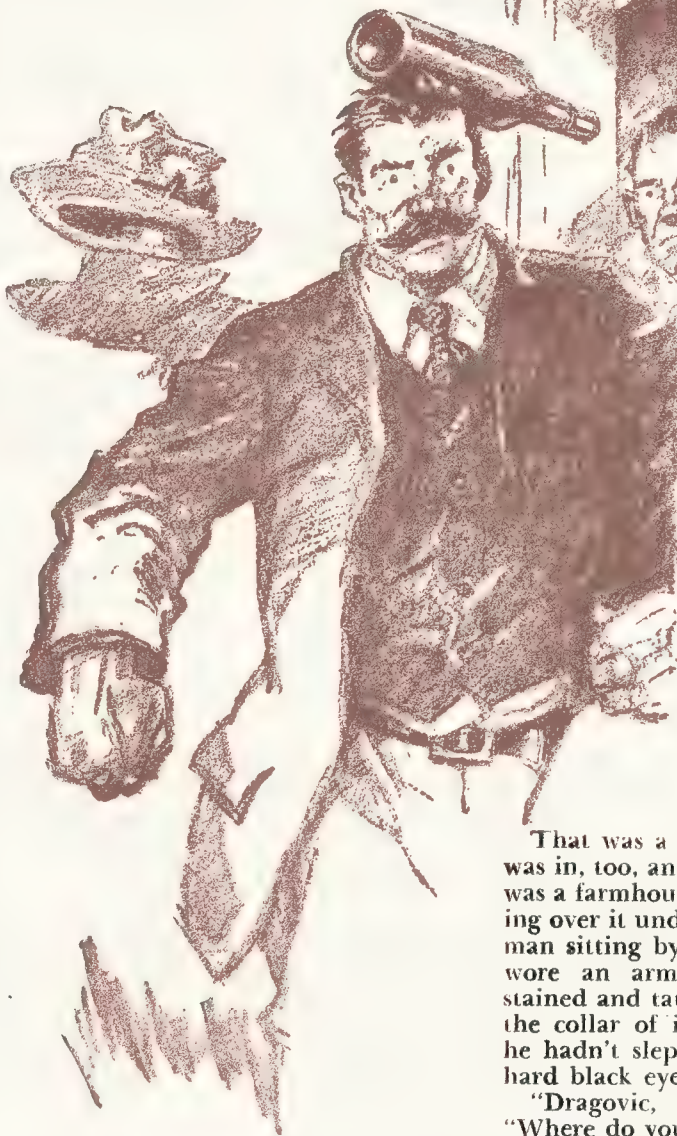
"*Ahai, Srbyo!*" he said all at once in an undertone.

Now that wasn't altogether a safe remark just there, maybe, but Marko Dragovic hadn't been conducted all the way from Brooklyn for nothing. The *caïque's* skipper overheard.

"So?" he queried. "And what do you here, Serb?"

"I return," said Marko simply. "There is a call upon me, my sir."

Away back in wise-cracking Manhattan they might have cackled at that,



Mike had stopped a downward smash with a bottle—a smash that would probably have felled a healthy rhinoceros.

That was a queer enough place he was in, too, and queer people. There was a farmhouse, with a big hill looming over it under the faint stars, and a man sitting by a lamp inside it. He wore an army uniform, incredibly stained and tattered, with gilt lace on the collar of it, and he looked as if he hadn't slept for a month, but his hard black eyes skewered Marko.

"Dragovic, eh?" he said sharply. "Where do you come from?"

Marko told him, and he slammed his fist on the table till things danced. "What is that?" he yelled. "Do you dare tell me, animal. . . *Ohé, Stepán!*" he called. "Come here and see. Another of them, by Saint Agnes!"

There was a note in his voice Marko didn't like a bit, somehow. Another man came forward into the light-circle and stood looking at Marko—a slim, olive-skinned little civilian with shell-rimmed glasses and a crisp black beard. He contemplated Marko for a full minute without speaking.

"No," he said finally. "Not this one, I think, my colonel." He dropped into surprising English, with an over-

but not here in the perilous Aegean. The skipper jerked a thumb at the tiny cabin.

"In there," he said. "I have a word for you, comrade."

And so there it was, the last lap of a fantastic journey. They put Marko ashore at night, somewhere on the Gulf of Salonica, and people took hold of him in the darkness—shadowy, weary men passing him from hand to hand like a bale of goods. Three nights went that way, and then at length there was a voice in the murk.

"*Ahai, Srbyo!*" it croaked, and Marko Dragovic knew he was home.

tone of sardonic humor in it. "Colonel Ioannides thinks you're a spy, fellow. You wouldn't be, of course?"

He broke off short, awaiting Marko's comment. When it came, it was short and pithy enough—Marko wanted to know, in the expressive speech of the mills, just why for God's sake he should be a spy, and anyway, what in hell might be cooking, here in these funny surroundings. He was quite vigorous on the subject, and the man with the beard laughed.

"Fair enough," he said. "All right, Dragovic—I'll go you. I'll tell you all that, if you'll tell me one thing. Why'd you come here? The name's Andreyev, Dr. Andreyev, by the way."

For the past minutes Marko had traveled a long way back toward the Mike Drucker part of him—but the direct question seemed to shift his gears again as it were. He fidgeted.

"There was a call—" he began awkwardly, and Colonel Ioannides snorted; but Dr. Andreyev was running his fingers thoughtfully among the curly hairs on his chin.

"Marko, eh?" he said all at once. "That was it, wasn't it?"

Marko assented, and the doctor turned to the table. "A word with you, Nick," he said significantly. "And in the meantime we'll let Marko here be fed and wait. You'll stay with us, eh, Marko?"

"*Hvala liepa!*" said Marko, wide-eyed. "Is not that why I am here?"

SO they took Marko Dragovic, and gave him bread and meat, and a shot or so of *slivovitz* to top off with, and after a while he slept resolutely, as men sleep who have come to journey's end and safe harbor. It was mid-afternoon when he awoke, to find Dr. Andreyev smiling down at him, a bundle of clothes under his arm.

"Put these on," he said. "Better than what you've got, anyway, comrade!"

Marko was still in the coal-stained dungarees of civilization, and the outfit spread before him was certainly a startler. There were the baggy blue breeches, the high boots, the jacket and sash of dark crimson, and the quaint Serb cap of red, black, and gold. Red, for blood, by the way, black for Kosovo's defeat, five gold stripes for five hundred years of remembrance—but Marko didn't know that yet. Dr. Andreyev chuckled at his expression.

"Hurry up," he said. "And don't start asking any damned questions, comrade. It doesn't go here."

He spoke with a certain twinkle, but there was an edge to him all right, Marko discovered. The clothes fitted loosely, pretty different from Mike Drucker's Pittsburgh Sunday-bests; and when he had got them on, Dr. Andreyev shoved him around.

"Stand there," he ordered. "Now there. . . . That's it. Look at me—"

There was a long pause, with Marko wanting desperately, but somehow not quite managing, to ask once more what the holy-jumpin' all this might be, and then Dr. Andreyev said something under his breath. He clapped his hands, and the door behind him opened.

"There, Ilya!" he said. "Look!"

Now, there are many tales told and songs sung of the beauty of these Balkan maids, and some of them are doubtless true enough. But the facts about little Ilya Petrov are simply that she wasn't, by any stretch of the imagination, one of these fabulous wood-nymphs, but quite an ordinary pretty Serbian girl.

In essentials, that is—for there were ways, to be sure, in which Ilya Petrov was very far from ordinary. Back in the spring the lads of the *Wehrmacht*, on their way south into Greece, had stopped off at her village, and—well, after that it was different with Ilya. There are plenty of young women in her case around Europe today, but it says a lot for Dr. Andreyev's perspicacity that he had recognized her as something a bit more than an unfortunate victim. She had a certain quality about her, the doctor felt, that made her a suitable recruit for the *chetnik* fraternity, up here in the hills. He was a curious guy, this Andreyev, and maybe he saw a little further into the average brick wall than most. Anyway, he now watched Ilya Petrov.

She stood in the doorway there, one hand at her throat, regarding Marko under her eyelashes. He was quite something to regard, at that, because the ancient, historic dress made him look like a million dollars, shoulders, craggy head, bushy mustache. Ilya seemed to think so, for she took her time about the inspection.

"Yes," she said at length. "That is it, Stepán."

The doctor nodded. "At least there is nobody knows him," he observed. "So it is probably worth trying, it seems. Marko, can you ride a horse?"

Well, then and there was the time when Marko's hereditary Serb temper finally got going, and he really started in to inquire what was what. It was quite a striking effort, its main burden being that he wasn't able, and didn't intend, to ride any horse for any purpose whatever. Dr. Andreyev listened in silence, and then turned to Ilya.

"Take him away," he said. "You can talk to him—if His Lordship will let you. He probably will, after a while."

With that he went out, and Marko found himself left alone with Ilya Petrov. That would have been quite all right, too, if Marko hadn't had ideas. Back in Pittsburgh he'd always been hell-on-wheels with the women,

and he didn't see—he didn't grasp—that this wasn't the same situation. Consequently, when he grinned and winked and made certain passes, he was a great deal surprised to find himself smacked in the jaw, one-two, with as fine a couple of round-armed swings as might be imagined—and little Ilya Petrov with a knife-blade that glittered no more coldly than her dark eyes.

"Try that once again, comrade," she said, "and see what comes! Follow me, now—there is a horse here it is necessary you should meet."

Marko was still rubbing the daze out of his brain-pan. "Yes'm," he said with alacrity. "Sure—right with you, ma'am!"

LOOK now at the Kossovopolye, the Field of Blackbirds, and its topographical, and other peculiarities.

It is a high upland valley, somewhat shallow in its formation, but rimmed with mountains of quite respectable steepness and complexity. A river flows down its middle, and it is dotted, here, there and everywhere, with little towns and villages—terraced with vineyards and plum-orchards and in summer white with the paperlike blossoms of the opium poppy. A mighty pleasant spot, if inclined to be bleak in winter, and certainly picturesque as all get-out.

At the time of present record, it was a little more than picturesque, maybe. The mountains were full of *chetniks*, nesting there like swarms of angry wasps. The fields were untilled, the villages mostly deserted, there was an ominous silence over it. And in the middle, in the shell of a market-town, sat a German gentleman in a fine East Prussian temper.

He was the paladin, Herr Oberst Gunther von Rothberg, and he commanded a battalion of the S.S. boys, under orders to abate and make to cease those pig-dog *chetniks* up in the hills there. It was an assignment in no way popular either with the Herr Oberst or his outfit; the outfit didn't like getting their throats cut on patrol, and the Herr Oberst, every time he thought of the rest of the army headed toward Russia and glory, went positively green with rage. He regarded the whole business as a gyp, in fact—a dirty professional gyp, and just about the time Marko was making acquaintance with the horse, he sent for his adjutant.

"I am tired of all this, *Hummelsakrament!*" he said. "Get out orders for tonight, Franz. We'll stamp on these swine once and for all."

That was it—extermination, after the methodical, efficient German manner. Gunther had seven or eight hundred pretty tough citizens under him, some guns and light tanks, and the cooperation of a squadron of the Luftwaffe's dive-bombers. With that

lot, he figured, it should be possible to stage a good show, a workmanlike affair that would be appreciated in Berlin.

"Their women, remember," said the excellent *Militär*. "And the children. Maybe they'll understand that."

So the orders went out, and—Intelligence being what it was in those desperate hills—by sundown Colonel Ioannides was looking at Dr. Andreyev across the table.

"Well?" he inquired.

Dr. Andreyev was at his usual fooleries with his beard. He shrugged.

"I am not in command here," he said. "But if I were—"

Colonel Ioannides flung his head up and bellowed into the evening, and men came a-running, and he mounted on the table and spoke to them, red-hot, fiery words—and Dr. Andreyev departed into the evening, looking for Marko Dragovic.

He had a little trouble finding him, to be sure, for Marko had been strictly incommunicado so far, under wraps, in the hole. The doctor discovered him at length, up in a cleft among the rocks, with Ilya Petrov and a large brown horse. The horse was looking mildly astonished, and well he might, considering what was going on. Marko and Ilya were seated on a flat boulder, and there was no doubt about the nature of their conversation. Dr. Andreyev himself gave a startled little cough, and they broke apart.

"So?" grinned the doctor. "He learns fast, Ilya, eh? Excellent—but now there is something else. The time is here, children!"

He explained in brief, hasty detail the substance of Colonel Ioannides' remarks from the table-top downhill there. Marko listened, and a queer, half-bemused expression that had been on his features cleared. He turned to Ilya.

"Eh, little pigeon," he said. "It is as you thought."

Ilya put her hand on his shoulder and smiled at him. "*Sprennite sa, chetnik!*" she said clearly.

THAT *sprennite sa* business needs a modicum of explanation. It means prepare yourself, get ready—oh, "get set" might be a fair translation of it; but the point is, it is old. It is five hundred years old, in fact, and then it was the motto or watchword or rallying-cry of a most interesting party indeed. He was the son of a prince, a hero in battle, a leader against oppression—and his name was Marko Kralyevic. Ask any Serb about that.

If you do, you will hear some mighty curious yarns. For this Kralyevic guy, the Serbs maintain, isn't dead; like Charlemagne and Frederick Barbarossa, he is supposed to be around yet, sitting in a cave in the

Field of Blackbirds, waiting. Moreover, he has with him his horse, Sharatz; and in some versions, his lady-love as well, the Maid of Kossovo. According to the Serbs, they will all of them come sallying out one day, and then it will be too bad for whoever happens to be doing dirt to Serbia.

So much for the yarn—the story of the Man on the Horse—and moreover the boys in Belgrade know it. In fact, unless you happen to be a squarehead Prussian landowner such as the Herr Oberst, it would be difficult to remain long in that corner of Europe and not know it. Or its possibilities, as applied to a crazy race that haven't the gumption to lie down when they're officially told they're dead.

Dr. Andreyev, of course, knew all about those possibilities—had known all along, the bright boy. Yet there were a couple of things he missed; the effect, for instance, upon the human cranium of a downward smash with a *slivovitz* bottle, and the results of the kind of love two such people as



Ilya and Marko Dragovic are apt to experience. It is a highly explosive affair, this, and if it gets out of hand at all, things are liable to happen. Especially when one of the parties is as indubitably out-of-repair in the upper story as Marko was.

Because, when the Herr Oberst went round his troops just after midnight for a final check-up and admonition, he was unpleasantly startled to see a bonfire.

It was high up on a mountain-flank, seven or eight miles away, a wavering plume of red flame, and Gunther swore.

"Try that once again, comrade," said Ilya Petrov, "and see what comes!"



"Now what?" he demanded. "They are up to something, these animals. Find out what it is, Franz. Call the pickets."

He stamped around for a while, and the adjutant tried to get the pickets on the wire; but he didn't succeed, for the excellent reason the pickets weren't in a situation to answer phone calls. They had been messily attended to by sudden *chetniks* with knives, and behind those advance elements were

plenty more, with better weapons than knives. The Herr Oberst had tanks and Tommy-guns and some light artillery as well, but the crowd silently descending from the rimrock had morale, pistols, hand-grenades, and dynamite-sticks. Also bottles filled with gasoline, and an intimate knowledge of the ground.

Further, they had, or were due to have, Dr. Andreyev's ace-in-the-hole. The good doctor hoped for a lot from that card—in fact, he was doing a little premature boasting about it.

"It is all right," he chuckled to the colonel. "That big booby will do just what Ilya tells him."

Wherein he was mistaken, for just then Marko Dragovic was behind a rock beating Ilya Petrov because she had said she was going to ride with him—a true Serbian beating, and Ilya nearly died with pure surprise.

"Now, my pigeon," said Marko, alias Mike Drucker, "you will not argue with me again, you hear. Remain here until I return or there will be more of it."

He gave her a couple more belts for luck and took a running jump onto the brown horse's back. A clatter of hoofs, a wild, banshee yell, and he was gone. Ilya stood rubbing her bruised ribs and looking after him.

"Man!" she said in a whisper. "Ah, man!"

Certainly Marko Dragovic was doing well for himself, there in the Field of Blackbirds.

He was doing rather more than well, as a matter of fact—he was pretty terrific. Dr. Andreyev's notion was that he should appear, horse and all, in the dawn, the misty half-light among the villages. His impact thus, as Marko Kralyevic or whatever, would be formidable, the doctor felt; should spark the *chetniks*, already lively enough, into something spectacular. It was a nice piece of hokum, nicely thought out; but it just didn't happen that way.

FOR Marko, in the pitch dark, his head full of whatever it was full of, and astride the still astonished horse, went roaring and bellowing through the countryside. By all conventional standards he was crazy as a bedbug, mad as a coot. Also he ought to have been killed a hundred times, if only by his own crowd of hair-trigger enthusiasts.

That he wasn't is probably due to one simple fact. The first lot heard him coming through the darkness, whooping blue murder, and promptly fired at him. Marko had the sense left to pull the horse on its haunches, and there was a pause.

"Who goes?" said the *chetniks* nervously.

Marko laughed, a belly-deep peal.

"Aho, Marko!" he yelled. "Aho-oo, Marko!"

Full of something-or-other, Serb patriotism, the bust on the bean, or mere love—or maybe a combination of all three—but it finished the already be-deviled horse, and it bolted, Marko clinging to its withers, still bawling his name. Maybe he thought, somewhere in the yeasty recesses of his mind, that it might act as a password, a countersign, and stop them shooting at him. If he did, he was in error, for the *chetniks* figured something totally different. It isn't possible for anybody called Marko to go rampaging and ballyhooing around in the Field of Blackbirds, at night, on a horse, in the middle of a battle of extermination, without raising questions in the Serb consciousness. They stared at one another and began to mutter, and the mutters turned to shouts, and the shouts spread, and in no time at all there was a very pretty kettle of fish a-boiling around there.

It just needed, as the doctor had surmised, that extra bit of funny-business, the hint of—well, things super-

natural, princes and powers of the air, moonshinery, to fill the boys full of the old zingo, the offensive spirit, the bloody-murder complex. The shouts turned to yells which grew fiercer and sharper, mounted—and the Serbs went in, on a three-mile front in the dark, and the Herr Oberst's warriors got a bellyful.

"*Excellenz*," the adjutant gasped, after another wild rush had developed

on their flank and rear, "we cannot hold them. We must go—"

Gunther listened for a moment to the rattle of machine-gun fire, the thunderous reports of dynamite, and that eldritch, infuriated screaming.

"Run?" he said grimly. "From that damned crew? Never in your life, Franz. Let us take a look at this *verfluchte* business if it is the last thing we do."



"Let us take a look at this business," he said, "if it is the last thing we do."

So that was the end of the Herr Oberst and his S.S. strong-boys. By dawn they were being hunted rat-fashion, in and out of the villages, and killed off without remark or argument whenever they showed. It was Kossovo all over again, with the odds the other way, up there in the Field of Blackbirds. . . .

The Serbs haven't stopped talking about it yet. They are still in those mountains, a thorn in the side of everybody that tries to interfere with them—German, Italian, or Hungarian. They come down at night still, and leave a few unpleasant-looking souvenirs around, and are gone with the daylight. In effect, they do what they pretty well choose. And they say they are waiting.

They are waiting, it seems, for Marko Kralyevic, who appeared to them that night, horse and all, and hasn't been seen since. He'll come, they say, when the time is ripe and once more lead them against the foe. Till then he has gone back, doubtless to his cave, where Sharatz champs oats at his side, and—maybe—the Maid of Kossovo sleeps in his arms.

Yes, it is a pretty legend they have about Marko Kralyevic. They believe it, too, and so do those boys up in Belgrade; more than half-believe it, anyway, with those uncomfortable consciences Hitler has given them. They'd die rather than admit it, but they're looking sideways, ever since Oberst von Rothberg's S.S. battalion got itself chopped to pieces that dark morning. It was a kind of fighting the *Herrenvolk* don't like at all. It was unfair, bewitched, ungentlemanly.

So say the Nazis. They believe that the Man on the Horse is somewhere around yet.

Maybe he is, at that. Maybe, up in the high cols on the Greek border, you might find a log hut among the snows, and a warm stable—and Marko. Maybe he's being kept in reserve there for another appearance, by that clever little biter Dr. Stepán Andreyev. Marko Dragovic, otherwise Mike Drucker, Pittsburgh steelworker, stand-in for Kralyevic the hero.

MAYBE. But there's one thing certain—if he's there, Ilya is with him. She hasn't been seen around, since that lively morning in the valley a while ago.

And it's just as likely she gets a tidy thrashing now and again, Balkan love—and Marko's—being what it is. And probably she says after it just what she said before.

"Man—ah, man!" Ilya says.

A mighty queer, unbalanced, woozy lot, the Serbs. Especially after they've been cracked hard over the skull with a liquor-bottle. In such a contingency, anything is possible to them, it seems—any damned thing at all.

A story of the sea but not of war,
by the author of "Hero Hater"

by **RICHARD
HOWELLS WATKINS**



All Hands!

UP on the weather end of the bridge young Luke Kilgore, the third officer, was wrinkling his lined forehead over what seemed to him a mystery.

The ship on the forward end of the wire hawser was a big arrogant fourteen-knot freighter. She should have been able to tow the smaller *Alice L. Grimsby* along at three times that speed in the smoothing sea. Why didn't she?

"That's what it is—a mystery," the weary Mr. Kilgore muttered. "With all the other grief, we've now got a mystery."

He looked forward and aft at his stricken ship. Sluggishly, like an unwilling beast, the *Alice L. Grimsby* slunk along at the end of the wire hawser. She buried the wire deep out of sight under the slow swells of the gray sea. But always, as she loitered, the steel thread lifted tautly, dripping, inexorable, and she was dragged on to westward. She was a swept and battered captive, with little fight left in her. Westward, back toward New York, four hundred miles away, she was hauled with her general cargo for Portuguese ports undelivered—a defeated ship. A gale had done this when her turbines quit turning.

With his red-rimmed eyes young Mr. Kilgore looked around for somebody to tell about his newly discovered mystery. This was his first voyage holding down a bridge watch, and it had been tough going. Save for the helmsman, he was alone on the bridge. The Old Man, unconscious, with head injuries and both legs broken, lay in his bunk. The second mate was dead. The same sliding tractor that had flattened out the Old Man down in Number Four 'tween decks, had finished the second mate. And Mr. Magnusson, the mate, hadn't stopped moving long enough to hear anything since she was on her beam ends.

Mr. Magnusson, the mate, came climbing up the iron rungs of Number Two hold. Below, a gang aided by clattering winches was still straight-

ening her up. The men were working slowly, a listless, defeated lot.

Down on the well-deck Mr. Magnusson walked to the rail. He held himself up by it as he looked ahead at the towing *Rockmoor*. Her hulk hid from him the yellow glower of the setting sun.

Magnusson came up to the bridge, moving his feet as if they were heavy. He jerked a long arm toward the *Rockmoor* and narrowed his flaring nostrils.

"Listen, kid," he said. "The life went out of us the minute Cap'n Kane passed us his line. Huh?"

"We'd been scrambling lively for six days," Luke Kilgore said, flattered that the mate had noticed him.

"Look at 'em," said the mate, glaring at the men at the winches and around the open hatch. "Near as dead as the four swept overside or mashed. Dead men! Huh?"

"Of course they've let down a bit, sir," Kilgore said.

The mate wagged his big head. "Dead!" he repeated. "An' that hawser's what killed 'em. They lost all their guts when I let Cap'n Kane take us in tow."

He scowled at Kilgore. "If I'd ha' known the sea was goin' to flatten out, I'd ha' let that bloodsucker Kane take a turn round his neck with his hawser."

"Kane never tried to save the hands when we lay like a half-tide rock," asserted Mr. Kilgore. "I've got that against him. He was standing by for salvage—not for rescue. He didn't even pump oil on the sea."

"He's got us now—for enough salvage to break this one-ship company an' put us all on the beach," said the mate. "He won't bargain; he's claimin' the moon." He lowered his voice: "But we got a spoke for his wheel—you an' me."

"We have, sir?" said the mystified third.

The mate crinkled up his leathery face in a confiding grin.

"You an' me, kid," he said. "Soon's the night comes down on her, you an' me get at that hawser with a file an' hacksaw."

"We? But—"

"As soon's it parts, we put some-thin' like this in the log: '*Rockmoor's* hawser carried away, leavin' us in as tough a jam as when she first put it aboard.' An' we report we're driven to east'ard, toward the mine-fields of Europe. Let's see how much salvage he'll get in court. Huh?"

He nodded his head many times.

"Well?" he said when Luke Kilgore didn't speak. "How about it? Her engines will be turnin' over soon."

LUKE KILGORE was looking at the sea and the sky with deep distrust.

"I'm not so worried about Kane losing some o' his salvage," he said. "But the crew's still sunk; the string's out o' their backbones. They've had hell."

"They'll come back fast, once we're loose from the *Rockmoor*."

"Sir, there's not enough stuff left in 'em to rig a ridin'-sail or make another sea-anchor. And the chief engineer don't promise power for nearly twenty-four hours yet. What if we got a touch o' weather?"

"What color's your liver, kid?"

"I'm a young officer, but I'm not so young I can be driven by bein' called yellow," said Luke Kilgore slowly. "You told me yourself the first day out that the way to be an officer was to be a man. I don't know that I can go along with you, Mister."

"Huh? You can't?" Mr. Magnusson brought his jaws together with deliberation, like a heavy cargo port closing. "You *will* go along with me,

you." He put a thumb against his chest. "I'm commander of this wagon, Mister! Commander of a ship, after years o' waitin' an' bein' passed up! The Old Man is shot—for keeps. I'm not lettin' you and Kane and this bunch o' weak-kneed swabs take my ship away from me in a salvage court. D'you get it? Huh?"

His voice was shaking, and his eyes were hot with fury. He was nothing like the pleasant old buffer he'd been in fair weather. Uneasily, Luke Kilgore listened to his rasping voice:

"What d'you s'pose Kane's been towin' at this rate for? Huh? It's to pile up the salvage—to be able to prove by his log he was buckin' heavy weather with us. Pilin' up his salvage money! Grabbin' my ship away from me! That's what!"

"I'm not defendin' Kane," said Kilgore doggedly. "But I'm not so sure, sir, that he's towin' slow just to swell up his claim. There's a mystery—"

"Stow it!" said Magnusson. "Are you obeying orders?"

Kilgore didn't know the answer. Obedience had been hammered into him in the school ship, and in half a dozen freight-houses in which he had served as A.B. and as quartermaster. His red eyes ran over the languid wraiths on deck. Since the *Alice* had stripped her turbine in a moderate gale, these men had fought like demons for their lives and ship. They had fought with all they had of brain, muscle and nerve to keep her out of the trough. And when the cargo had shifted, they had fought to stand her up again. They had contested every single step of the long slide down from trim ship to helpless hulk. But they weren't good for another such fight—not right on top of the first one. They must have rest.

"Give the engineers another day, sir," Kilgore urged. "I don't like this sky. The North Atlantic in May can tune up a full gale in—"

"Have a hacksaw ready—an' plenty of blades," said the mate. "God help you if you don't, kid! Get off the bridge! You got two hours."

OF a sudden he saw where Luke Kilgore's gaze had turned, and he caught at Luke's arm. "An' keep your eyes off the Old Man's quarters an' your foot this side o' his weather-board," he commanded harshly.

"I was just wondering if—"

"The Old Man is out of this—unconscious—maybe dyin'." His grip tightened till pain shot up Luke's arm. "I'm in command here, an' I enforce my orders to the limit. If you go crazy from strain, I can deal with you, kid. Move, now!"

Luke Kilgore descended the bridge ladder. He avoided the cabin under the chartroom where the Old Man lay. Every moment made clearer to

him the reason for the mate's unreason. The craving for command, thwarted for years, had festered in Magnusson's mind until he was ready to take desperate chances. This ship was to be his or no one's.

Luke kept on going till he reached the engine-room. The black-gang had performed no flashy miracle to relieve him from making a decision. The job on the turbine was far from finished. He knew enough about engines to see that. He watched in silence the labors of sweating men with eyes as bloodshot as his own.

A chunk of metal, perhaps a bolt, had got through the basket strainer on the main steam-line. Once in the turbine, between rows of fixed blades on the casing and rotating blades on the shaft, that bolt had raised deadly havoc. Those ordered ranks of whirling blades had been converted in one brief instant into a fusing mass of steel. The turbine had been jolted to a grinding halt. Burst boilers, broken main shaft, a lost propeller, could not have robbed the ship of power more swiftly and brought her helpless into the trough.

For days, Mr. Kilgore knew, these men—engineers, oilers, water-tenders and firemen—had toiled in a ship almost on her beam ends to start the many threaded bolts that had held that casing together against the thrust of imprisoned superheated steam. They had been set up, those bolts, with box wrenches driven around by sledges. For many months those bolts had tightened under terrific heat. It seemed presumptuous for men even to try to start them, but—the men had done it. As her heel was gradually corrected, they had begun working up the casing with a chain hoist, wedges, crowbars. Men with hammers and cold chisels must cut away the fused and twisted blades of every injured row in the high-pressure stage. Only then would the turbine turn.

Graham, the chief engineer, fined down in weight, with vertical wrinkles that made his smeared face seem even thinner, turned on the third mate.

"Weather?" he asked, with a smoldering eye on his suspended casing.

"Nothing too tough in sight," Luke Kilgore said. "But it wouldn't help to lose our tow, would it?"

The chief pointed up at the tons of metal in that huge casing. It was steadied on the bolts and on the bridles of the chain hoist. From the expression on his face the third mate got a vivid idea of what a beam sea would do. Once that suspended mass broke free to start swinging—

"Blood pudding," said Graham. . . .

Luke Kilgore stopped in at the spare cabin stateroom next to his own where the radio operator was convalescing. A wave had made hash of

his transmitter and shack, and had nearly done a job on him.

"Sparks," said Kilgore to the battered operator, "I know your set's washed up. But is there any way of juggling condensers and stuff on the broadcast receiver in my room? I want to find out what the *Rockmoor's* sending."

Sparks groaned, touched the bandage across his cheekbone and moved his jaw as if experimentally a couple of times.

"The *Rockmoor*?" he said slowly. "What d'you care what she's sending now? Captain Kane sent plenty during the four days we were on our ear—tellin' rescue ships he had the situation in hand. And never putting out a boat, the rat! What—"

"Can you find out what she's sending?"

"Of course I can! What kind of—"

"Sure, sure," said Kilgore. "Only do it, will you? Show me."

HE left Sparks heaving himself up. Outside, a bitter dusk had come on the ship. The men on the well-deck were getting the hatch covers on Number Two. Mr. Magnusson had descended from the bridge to oversee the job. He'd been on the spot when anything was happening, ever since the turbine had been stripped.

"Graham says it would be finish for us if she got into the trough before he had the casing bolted down, sir," Kilgore said, close to the mate's ear.

Without warning Magnusson struck out. His fist jolted on Kilgore's jaw and sent the younger man toppling backward toward the open hatch.

With clawing hands Luke Kilgore saved himself from a fall to the lower hold. The weary men on the deck stopped moving to stare.

The mate stood on straddling legs, unmoved by the third's narrow escape. His eyes were as hard as blue marbles. More than the impact of Magnusson's fist, Kilgore felt the impact of the mate's fixed idea.

"I'll hammer guts into you if hammering will do it, Mister," Magnusson said loudly. "Why can't you take it, like the crew? This is no time to crack up."

More softly he added: "If you've snitched to the chief, I'll fix you, Mister—I'll fix you for life."

Kilgore stood up. In that brief scene Magnusson had robbed him of all influence over the crew. They'd believe he was yellow.

"I've snitched to no one," Kilgore said. "And you aren't helping this ship's chances any, blackening your only officer to the crew."

Magnusson changed his tone. He took Kilgore by the arm in friendly fashion. "You're right," he said. "I might ha' known that you wouldn't snitch." He grinned. "Specially as

Without warning Magnusson struck out. His fist jolted on Kilgore's jaw and sent the younger man toppling toward the open hatch.

you know the chief would never interfere with the deck."

He shook his head with positive force. "She won't broach to," he said. "We still got that last sea-anchor we made for her. It'll hold her for a week, let alone a few hours, till the chief gets the mill turning."

Kilgore looked at the remains of the yellow sunset. "You think you can pick the weather?" he said, almost awed by the confidence in the mate's voice.

"This is my break, and I'm taking it," said Magnusson. His fist knotted up at his side as he scowled ahead at the dim bulk of the *Rockmoor*. "Kane aint robbing me o' my ship. What'll it be, kid? Irons for you now, or a little help for me on the foredeck later?"

Kilgore didn't answer. He couldn't see how choosing handcuffs would help his ship or this bunch of exhausted men. But if ever there was warning of wind in a sunset, that dying one ahead had it. A homemade sea-anchor lasting out a gale? They had ripped up three of them, made of the best canvas in the ship, during their travail.

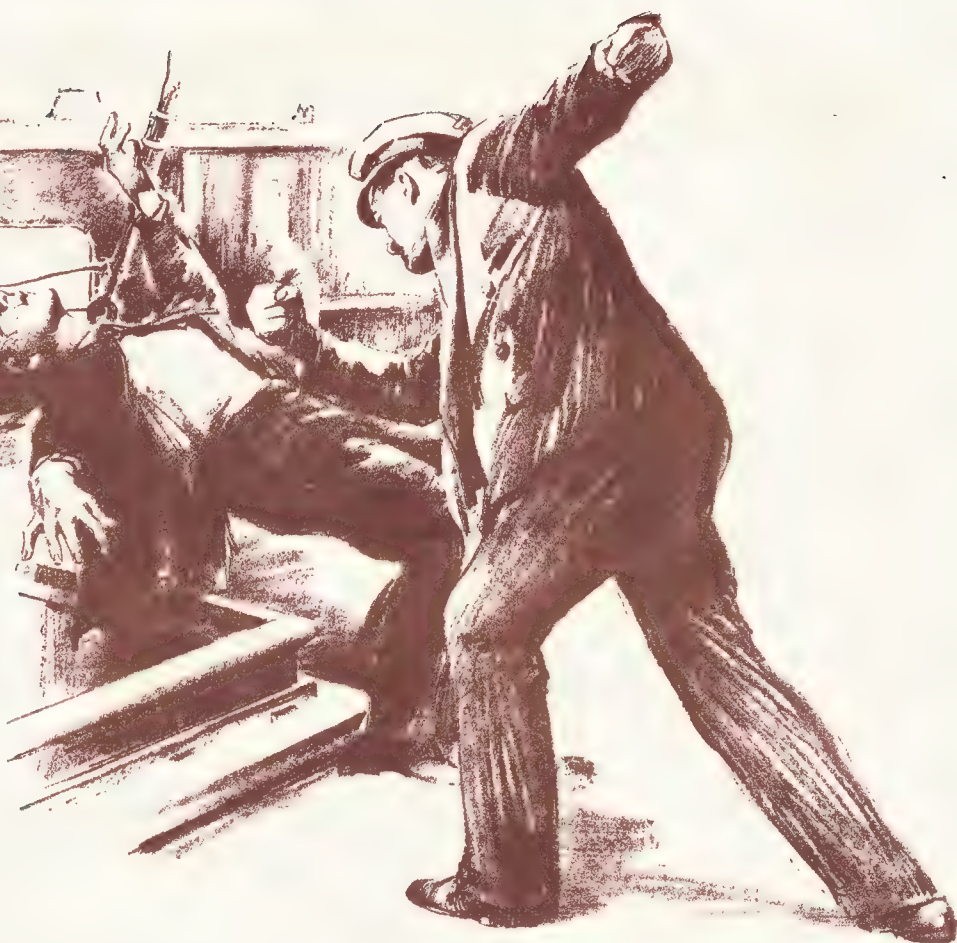
Magnusson patted him on the shoulder, a fatherly caress.

"I aint the only one this will help," he said. "I'll see you get your step. You'll be second mate with me, kid. I'll be lucky to have you."

"Stow the oil," said Kilgore. "I'll be on the forecastle head to get over that sea-anchor if I'm forced to, not to cut the hawser."

"Good enough," said Magnusson. It wasn't the answer Kilgore expected.

The reason for that acquiescence came out later, when Kilgore went forward an hour before midnight. It was a starlit night, with the icy wind in the northwest. The *Alice* was still being dragged on against a broad swell with a little bobble on top of it. Ahead, the lights of the *Rockmoor* crawled on.



Magnusson had old Pyle, the boatswain with him, and the boatswain's whisky breath perfumed the night. Not another man was on watch. "The bos'n will give you a hand with the sea-anchor after he's given me a hand with the hawser," said the mate in a strained whisper. "We'll answer no signals from the *Rockmoor* once we're clear of her."

INSTEAD of making a bridle of his anchor chains and shackling the *Rockmoor's* wire to them, Magnusson had brought the hawser itself inboard to the windlass.

It was a tough wire, that hawser. Magnusson, with an imprecation, turned a flashlight, screened carefully, on the deck.

"The job's got to look ragged, like the wire had parted when the two ships got on opposite sides of a couple o' big seas," Magnusson said. "We can't figure to fool old Kane. But a ragged end will mean plenty if it ever goes to an admiralty court."

Of a sudden he uttered a startled grunt. Kilgore looked up, and found the faces of the other two men visible to him. Each of the men straightened his back instinctively. There was a light on them—a vivid light, blinding when they looked into it. The light came from the stern of the *Rockmoor*, and as it spotted them there on the forecastle head, Magnusson rasped out: "Down! That snooping old rip!"

The *Rockmoor's* whistle let go with a series of sharp, short blasts. It was a warning. Almost at the same moment they felt her slacken speed. Magnusson was cursing Captain Kane for a suspicious, crooked old wart.

Lights blazed on the *Rockmoor's* starboard quarter. A couple of cargo clusters threw radiance on a boat. Men were busy with davit falls.

"They're putting over a boat!" said Kilgore.

Magnusson rounded on him. "By Peter, if I thought you'd been working a Morse signal lamp to spoil my play—" he muttered.

Kilgore laughed. "And you called Kane suspicious!" he said. "You'd better be faking up a story for him."

"Slide those tools into your coat an' pants an' get aft," Magnusson said to the boatswain. He turned to Kilgore. "We were up here to inspect the wire for chafe, see? An' we found it working against—"

"You sing the words; I'll just hum the tune," Kilgore said. He went aft.

Magnusson followed, very close on his heels. Kilgore could feel the mate's eyes hard upon the back of his head. Mr. Magnusson said not another word. They descended to the well-deck; and the mate, making sure that the *Rockmoor's* boat had been launched, ordered the boatswain to get over the Jacob's ladder. Across the lifting swells the white boat came dropping back to them. . . .



Captain Kane himself was the first man to board the *Alice*. There was no doubt about who he was; Kilgore had seen the narrow-chested little man for days on his bridge. In defiance of tradition, the *Rockmoor's* captain had left his ship to look after his salvage interests. Behind, came three seamen, wrestling with seabags.

Captain Kane wasted no words. He spotted Magnusson with an impolite flashlight, looked him over thoroughly and then, without a word, stalked forward. Magnusson followed, loudly voicing his story.

Kane bent beside the towing hawser and gave it a going-over. He put a finger on the strands that the files and hacksaw had attacked. Little damage had been done before the *Rockmoor's* searchlight had blazed.

"Chafe, eh?" Captain Kane gave a goat-like bleat of laughter.

"You're short-handed, Captain," he said to Magnusson sardonically. "I'm lending you three men. One of 'em will stand watch forward here to help you look out for—chafing."

"I don't want 'em," said Magnusson hoarsely.

"You're in no spot to refuse," Captain Kane snapped. "D'you think your word would prevail against mine? What are night-glasses and searchlights for? How long d'you think the Board would let you hold

As the light spotted them, Magnusson rasped: "Down! That snooping old rip!"

your ticket if— Must we go into that? I think not."

Magnusson was silent.

"That's settled, then," said Captain Kane. "All's well that ends well—for me, Captain. If it doesn't end well for me, it will end worse for all hands. Consider that, Captain!"

HE strode back to the Jacob's ladder. There he halted and looked at the officers and a few of the *Alice's* men who had had enough power left in them to leave their bunks.

"No ungrateful bunch of wharf-rats ever did me out of a penny of salvage," he said. Though his voice was thin, it carried to every pair of ears on deck. "Bear that in mind, the lot of you. I've made all arrangements to put you safe alongside a dock. Take it easy. You're passengers—get that? Passengers!"

Briskly he slid over the rail and descended to his boat.

Magnusson, muttering to himself, got some volume back into his voice as the oarsmen got under way.

"Blast that old ram!" he said. "He'll go to the Board with this! I know him. He'll have my ticket, sure. I aint got a thing to lose now."

He sidled toward Kilgore, changed his mind, shoved past and stamped away up to the bridge.

Luke Kilgore stood by the rail, only vaguely aware of the mate's fulminations. He knew Magnusson wasn't through. Again he was wrestling with what he called a mystery; again he was driving his weary brain to thought, an unpleasant process that seemed inevitably connected with the job of being an officer. What he was thinking was that Captain Kane had said: "I've made all arrangements to put you safe alongside a dock." Why hadn't he said simply: "I'll put you alongside a dock?" A master doesn't make arrangements; he gives orders.

Luke Kilgore headed for his room in the bridgehouse. Sparks was still there, with his battered body hunched over the chassis of Kilgore's radio.

"I aint passed out yet," said the operator. "I been waiting for you." "Pick up any o' the *Rockmoor's* sending?"

Sparks touched his tender jaw. "Plenty," he said. "Only, I can't make out a word of it."

"Code?"

"Some kind o' double-talk between the *Rockmoor* and another o' the line, the *Peatmoor*," Sparks grunted. "Well, yeah, it is code—a private code."

"The *Peatmoor*! That tells me nearly as much as if you could make

'em out," said Luke Kilgore. "Any way of doping the *Peatmoor's* position or how she's heading?"

"She's not where she should be," Sparks said. "Because that's in Norfolk, with her set closed down and her op' ashore. I know her schedule. That's all I can tell now."

Luke Kilgore nodded. He stood still, listening a minute to the noises of the wind, the sea and the ship. Then he flung himself down on his bunk, and was instantly unconscious.

SOMETIME later, with his seaman's instinct blasting him out of his sleep, Luke Kilgore sat upright. Sparks was gone. Drearily Kilgore staggered out onto the floor. It would be time to relieve Magnusson on that mockery of a bridge watch. The ship was pitching and fighting her tow-line. The west wind was making up.

He started toward the door. He was stopped by the sight of a piece of paper thumbtacked to his radio set. On it Sparks had scrawled:

"I'd say the *Peatmoor* was heading toward us, but I could be kidding myself."

Luke Kilgore nodded his aching head. "Maybe that's why Captain Kane has 'made all arrangements' to put us alongside a dock," he said aloud. "The *Peatmoor's* coming to take us over from the *Rockmoor*."

He hurried up to the bridge. Magnusson wasn't there. Chartroom and wheelhouse alike were deserted, save for the glum helmsman.

A moon, slicing puffy white clouds, gave him a glimpse of two men on the forecastle head. Two! He looked at the clock in the wheelhouse. It was still the mate's watch—by thirty minutes. He hurried forward onto the head. There the cold northwester hit him hard, though the *Rockmoor* was barely keeping steerage way on her.

The two men he had seen were Magnusson and one of the *Rockmoor's* hawser guards. The mate had his hand on the man's arm, and his voice was murmurous and confidential. The bridge and the deck were getting together at last. What for? Magnusson wheeled with savage abruptness as Kilgore approached.

"Get back to the bridge," the mate said.

"Sir, I see a chance to—"

"You had your chance, and muffed it like a yellow dog," said Magnusson harshly. "Stay away from me."

"Captain Kane's been in touch with the *Peatmoor*," said Kilgore. "The reason I think he's—"

"Bos'n!" bawled Magnusson. He belied up to Kilgore. "Get going before I have the bos'n iron you."

"There may be a way to save the ship from—"

"I'm playing along without you, Mister," said the mate. "You're no

officer of mine. And if you open your hatch here or on the beach—" He slung his fist.

Luke Kilgore had been expecting it. The mate was frantic. On top of anguish at the loss of his opportunity to cut free of the *Rockmoor* was a cold certainty that Kane would break him. . . . It was no trick to dodge Magnusson's swing, but the mate bore in again. From the well-deck came the thump of old Pyle's feet. Luke Kilgore knew he was close to handcuffs and complete helplessness. He dropped down the ladder. At the bottom the old boatswain moved aside for him.

Kilgore went aft. He could hear the angry rasp of Magnusson's voice giving orders to Pyle. On the lower bridge he looked back. Pyle was clumping aft again toward him. That was bad.

Quickly Kilgore ducked out of sight. He made his way to Captain Braden's quarters. The steward, wrapped in a couple of blankets, was bent over in a chair he had dragged outside the Old Man's bedroom. His head rocked from side to side as the ship pitched, but he was sound asleep. Kilgore slid past him and opened the Old Man's door.

A reek of disinfectants filled his nostrils. He stepped in and closed the door. A shaded light showed him the Old Man stretched out on his brass bed. Kilgore had helped Magnusson to set his broken legs. Now Captain Braden's thin features looked as cold as marble under the bandage around his temple. Startled, Luke Kilgore bent over him. But the Captain was still alive; he was breathing.

There was no hope for a perplexed young officer in this sickroom. Little as he knew about concussion, it was quite plain to Kilgore that Captain Braden couldn't be disturbed, couldn't be moved, couldn't be helped in any way save by leaving him alone. And meanwhile his ship was being dragged this way and that by the greed of Captain Kane and the lust for command of Mr. Magnusson. Maybe the Old Man would rather go out than awaken, a master who had lost his ship by cold process of salvage law or by febrile recklessness. Whoever won, Captain Braden lost. And the irony of it was that the Old Man should never have left his post of command on the bridge to go down into Number 4 hold. That had been the mate's job, and Magnusson had been doing it.

Of a sudden Kilgore heard the thump of old Pyle's sluggish boots outside in the corridor. He stood motionless, listening, with his eyes still automatically on the Old Man's face.

The steward, too, had heard Pyle's seaboots. He answered the old boatswain's question snappily.

"Of course 'e aint been 'ere! What did the mate put me 'ere for?"

Kilgore moved. He raised a hand to the Old Man in salute, without mockery.

"Aye, sir," he said aloud. "I will tell the mate."

His hand gripped the doorknob an instant before the steward's startled clutch outside turned it. His body fitted swiftly into the opening door, and he confronted the steward and the boatswain. Their eyes were big.

"Yes sir," Kilgore said over his shoulder to the still figure. Then he closed the door.

"He wants to be left alone, steward," he said. "He's weak. Let him rest."

"'E came to?" gasped the steward.

Kilgore looked coldly at him. Then he turned to the boatswain. "What are you doing here?" demanded.

The boatswain thrust a couple of fingers inside his pea-jacket collar and wriggled his neck.

"Get out," said Luke Kilgore. He stood there until old Pyle backtracked out of sight. Then, without haste, he retraced his own steps, toward the forecastle head. His lips were tight together, and once he crossed his fingers.

The boatswain was ahead of him. He was scuttling across the well-deck. Magnusson came aft, to the break of the forecastle head, to meet Pyle. Kilgore got there in time to catch the boatswain's hoarse voice, flung aft by the gusty wind:

"I heard him talking to the Captain, sir."

Magnusson, a thick dark figure against the sky, waited in silence as Kilgore mounted the ladder.

"The Skipper's taken over, sir," Luke Kilgore said to the mate. "No special orders—except that he stuck me with the job of watching the tow-line till the turbine's set."

KILGORE could hear the mate drawing in air through his nostrils in spasmodic fury.

"D'you think you can get away with this, you rat?" Magnusson said.

"Barring mutiny, I can, sir," said Luke Kilgore.

Magnusson let go his breath with a yell of laughter. "You wouldn't scare me, would you, kid?" he said.

"I couldn't say," said Luke Kilgore. He walked forward, toward the windlass. Magnusson walked beside him, his shoulder touching Kilgore's. The *Rockmoor's* man shifted his weight uncertainly.

"Suppose I go aft now an' find the Old Man still out?" said Magnusson softly. "Where'd that leave you, huh?"

"Fo'c'stle head," said Kilgore. His voice was crisp. He stopped beside the barrel of the windlass.

"That's what I thought," said Magnusson. "And supposin' I told you to

come aft with me to confirm them orders?"

"I couldn't go, sir," said Luke Kilgore. "Master's orders."

Magnusson nodded slowly, as if he were quite calm. But in the darkness his breathing didn't sound calm.

He turned from Luke Kilgore and walked aft. Kilgore stood rigid long after he had seen Magnusson's figure as a black blur moving up the ladder up to the bridgehouse. Kilgore stepped to the side and looked down at the dark water. The ship's movement through the water was made perceptible by no bow wave. Seas butted against her; she pitched to them, giving the illusion of movement. Over to leeward, the *Rockmoor's* man was staring at him.

Five minutes later Magnusson appeared again. Pyle trailed at his heels. Magnusson strode rapidly. Kilgore made out that his right hand was invisible in the pocket of his watchcoat. Decision was written in every move he made. To Kilgore's ears came the clink of handcuffs in Pyle's hands. They were close, now.

Quickly Luke Kilgore pulled a flashlight from his pocket. He let the beam swing briefly toward the *Rockmoor*.

The effect was instantaneous. From the funnel of the ship ahead came a blast of noise. At the same time Kane's searchlight hit them all with solid brilliance.

The seaman whom Captain Kane had stationed on the forecastle head straightened up with a yelp of dismay.

"Cap'n Kane's got his eye on us!" the man cried to Magnusson. "He's watchin' now!"

Magnusson stopped dead in front of Luke Kilgore. The irons in Pyle's hands were still clicking together.

"You're smart, kid," the mate said harshly. "You've postponed a show-down. But when it comes, it'll come double now!"

They turned aft, both of them. Kilgore stood still in the *Rockmoor's* light, with the cutting wind freezing the sweat on his face. He could feel the imminence of a crisis. It was like a big ship looming up ahead out of a fog.

"Why should a good enough guy like Magnusson have to go screwy in a jam?" he asked himself.

THE *Rockmoor's* searchlight stayed on him. His eyes were stung by hurtling salt. His eardrums were thrumming with the sound of rushing wind and flying water. That keen wind was slashing white wounds in the black bulk of the ocean.

The *Alice's* bows continued to front the seas. That was the only sign that the *Rockmoor* was maintaining a strain on the hawser. The light was a screen behind which the thing that Luke Kilgore anticipated might be hap-

pening in that slow-moving freighter. The mystery of her crawling pace might soon be explained. He could not tell—yet.

Captain Kane's watcher was relieved by one of his mates. Kilgore was getting stiff with cold. He kept moving desperately, hunting signs of dawn. He must not stop, or he would never move again.

Imperceptibly now, the *Rockmoor's* blinding light faded. Interminable gloom was slowly yielding to a vague pallor around the horizon. As blackness lifted sluggishly, the *Alice* became less sure in her rebuffing of the seas. She gave way to them, paying off a couple of points one way or the other before the wire hawser brought her back.

To Kilgore, this meant the power of the *Rockmoor* was dying. When her searchlight flicked off with dawn, he studied the ship ahead. The increasing seas were knocking her bow around too.

"It's come!" Luke Kilgore said to the wind. "Her oil-tanks are running dry. Oil fever! That's why Kane's kept her speed down. We've got him on the barrel—if we come through. He warned off other rescue-ships when he didn't have the fuel to do the job himself."

Magnusson was visible up on the bridge now. He was pacing unceasingly. Kilgore thought he could feel his menacing eyes. Magnusson sent a couple of men forward to rig lifelines across the low well-deck between forecastle head and bridgehouse. He knew the sea was rising.

On the lower bridge a few of the *Alice's* crew were staring furtively at Kilgore, sensing that something was up. Though he strained his eyes he could not see a single man of the black-gang in the group. They were still below, fighting steel. The turbine job wasn't finished.

The steward, his eyes bulging with curiosity, came forward, clutching the lifeline with one hand and a jug of coffee with the other.

"Radio operator says to tell you the *Peatmoor* is 'eading this way,'" the steward said as Kilgore gulped down the hot stuff. "Cap'n Kane's dropped code. Too slow. 'E's yellin' for more speed aht o' the *Peatmoor*."

"When's she due?"

"'E 'asn't overheard, sir."

Kilgore grunted.

The steward hurried aft. On the well-deck he ducked close against the rail to dodge a sheet of spray knocked from the top of a wave.

Ahead, the *Rockmoor* was yawing violently. Kilgore caught a glimpse of her foredeck. He saw a cluster of men. They were getting ready to drop over a sea-anchor. The *Rockmoor* was practically dead in the water. The hawser was slack.

A sea-anchor—to hold two ships in this blow! And the *Alice* was deeper in the water than the *Rockmoor*. That meant the big *Rockmoor* would go downwind faster than her tow. It would be a mess.

Captain Kane had made no signal. Kilgore stepped toward the steel hawser on the windlass. Ironically the moment had come when he must cast off. He looked aft. Magnusson was hurrying down to the lower bridge.

Kilgore's eyes widened suddenly. The chief engineer had come strolling from the working alley out onto the well-deck. He was lighting his pipe, full in the wind. That defiance, like his casual appearance and the very set of his shoulders, meant something good. Magnusson was going to meet him.

With quick uneasiness Luke Kilgore glanced to windward. Her momentum gone, the *Alice's* bow was falling off fast. A big comber was sweeping toward her port side. It kept piling up, higher and higher.

Suddenly the hawser tightened and stopped her.

IT was impossible to make the chief hear. Kilgore started toward him, shouting. He clattered down to the well-deck. Graham was a long way off across the deck. Above on the lower bridge Magnusson roared a warning of the big sea. But the complacent chief had lowered his head and cupped his hands to try another match. His gesture of defiance to the gale was not complete.

Kilgore, running hard, knew himself too far away. Big seas move fast. Of a sudden he saw Magnusson poised at the top of the ladder. He was going to jump.

It was then that the sea came aboard. It swept the well in green fury, burying the rail deep. The chief jerked up a horrified face. But it was too late.

One sea! One sea would wipe out the feud of the two living mates and the triumph of the chief engineer.

Magnusson was leaping from the top of the ladder. He had forgotten command, hatred of Kane, everything. As he landed in the swirling water, Magnusson's right arm hooked around old Graham's narrow body, his left darted to the ladder stanchion.

That much Kilgore made out as he jumped onto the top of Number One hatch and grabbed for the lifeline. Then the sea took him, too.

The bulk of the sea was hitting further aft, by the bridgehouse. Kilgore, wrapped around the lifeline, was in white water that lacked the hitting power and suction of a solid green sea. He thrust his head up without much hope for the others.

Only the mate's left arm, with muscles knotted, showed above the

surging water. That arm was attached by iron fingers to the rail of the ladder. For a good two seconds, while the sea roared by, the big mate maintained his grip. Two seconds—against the sea's might! Then the rushing water conquered. Magnusson and the engineer were swept down to leeward.

Kilgore struggled on aft through loose water dragging at his legs. That momentary grip of the mate's had kept the two men from going overside on the crest of the sea. Both men showed above the water, crumpled up over by the bulkhead, jammed against the iron bars of a freeing port.

Kilgore got to them, with a man from the lower bridge at his heels. They grabbed the limp bodies and turned apprehensive eyes toward the weather bulkhead. But the next sea lifted the ship.

ward, a good way off. The hawser? He understood. That big sea had knocked the two ships apart. . . . The hawser had snapped.

Somehow, Kilgore felt better. With that sea running he might not live as long, but he felt better. The hawser was gone. The old wagon was on her own again.

The time came late that afternoon when Mr. Kilgore, gazing through the spindrift of a full westerly gale, made out the code letters K.P. at the starboard yardarm of the floundering *Rockmoor*.

"That means 'Send me a line,'" he said to Sparks. "And it's us Captain Kane is talking to. This'll pay better than ten runs to Lisbon."

For a good two seconds, while the sea roared by, the mate maintained his grip. Two seconds, against the sea's might!



He cupped his hands. "Come on, you lugs!" he shouted. "All hands! We're free! Get over the sea-anchor!"

The men moved. Maybe it was just because they had had a night's rest. But Kilgore thought otherwise. Free! Perhaps Magnusson had been right about that hawser squeezing most of the fight out of them.

"Make it a short hour, Chief!" Kilgore said. "We'll keep her off her beam ends that long. I know it! All hands!"

It was a long hour, no matter what clocks said. But the enlivened men kept her head to the sea. They nursed the sea-anchor by easing off the line every time a big one hit her. It was hell, but they had hope now.

They cheered thinly, with the last that was in them, when they felt the ship's first shudder under the thrust of the propeller. She had her life back too.

Kilgore looked to eastward, over the water they had crossed, toward Captain Kane's powerless *Rockmoor*. Then he looked to westward and saw nothing of the *Peatmoor*.

"Magnusson will be out here again if he hears," Sparks said.

Kilgore frowned. And then it seemed to the watching operator that Kilgore went into a sort of trance. He stood there, looking at the sea, and down and around at the ravaged ship, as if he were living through the last eight days.

"What's the matter?" Sparks said. "You can handle it!"

Kilgore nodded. "I could," he said. "But I'm not going to."

Sparks' eyes grew larger.

"The Old Man got his trying to do the mate's job as well as his own," Kilgore said. "Magnusson cracked up trying to stand three men's watches. I'm not sap enough to risk two ship's companies for a grandstand play!"

He took Sparks by the arm with a resolute grip.

"Rouse out Magnusson," he said. "He's had ten hours in. All hands! Rouse out every man that's fit to work. That's what command is, Sparks—using men, not doing it for 'em."

"All hands," repeated Sparks. "But if Mag—"

"Kane's squawk for assistance is what any doctor'd order for Captain Magnusson. Tell him we're standing by him to help salvage that lubber to leeward. All hands—to work ship!"

They carried Magnusson and Graham to the lower ladder, where other hands were waiting. Graham was conscious. He still gripped his pipe tightly between his teeth. Magnusson was out, his head laid open by the steel bulwark. The flesh-wound was bleeding fast. He had chewed his lips as he had held against the sea.

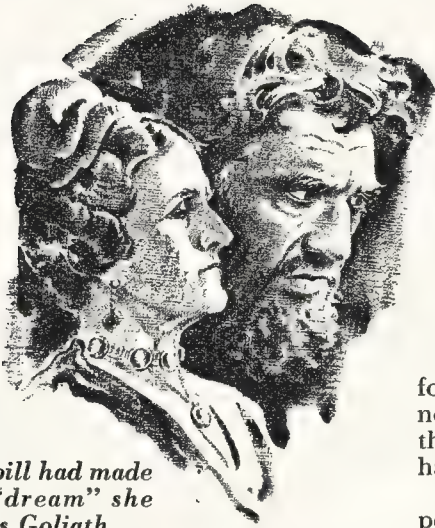
Luke Kilgore shook Graham's arm. "How about the turbine, chief? The turbine?"

"Within an hour," Graham muttered. "Almost two-thirds power. Is Magnusson—"

"He just looks bad," said Kilgore. "Any sleepin' he's done for seven days has been on his feet. He's frazzled, body an' brain."

He beckoned to the steward and a messman. "Magnusson spreads himself out too thin," he added. "Take him to his bunk."

Kilgore looked forward. His eyes squinted. The *Rockmoor* was to east-



The pill had made her "dream" she was Goliath.

Mammoths

He weighed six tons and was never really house-broken, but he came through in a big way.

MR. HOBART HONEY was not a mean man and therefore was not prone to the practice of stinginess—so that it gave him a small shock when he first realized that it had never once occurred to him to share with any of his friends the dubious joys which he was extracting from the use of the pills so kindly presented to him by the Tibetan Lama. A pill that has the power temporarily to transport the person who swallows it back into a life which he has lived hundreds, maybe thousands, of years ago is at least a novelty, and at most a miracle. And if a person possesses some hundreds of such miracles, surely, reflected Mr. Honey, it is only bare decency to present a miracle or two to a pal.

He acted on the idea with the impulsiveness of a naturally generous man. He had very little difficulty in selecting from his numerous acquaintances three people to be recipients of his gifts. One of these was his friend the Bishop of Stretchester, a serious man who claimed to suffer from his nerves. Mr. Honey strongly recommended one of his pills and promised the Bishop another if he found that the first pill did anything for his nerves. It did something for them—it came near to wrecking them utterly, for the Bishop "dreamed" (as he described it) that he had been changed into Balaam's ass and, as such, spent a considerable time experiencing the various vicissitudes of that ill-starred quadruped. The Bishop did not ask

for another pill, and Mr. Honey did not explain that if he had "dreamed" that he had been Balaam's ass, then he had evidently got on in the world.

Another pill Mr. Honey gave to a politician friend of his, but this too was far from proving a staggering success. The politician "dreamed" that he was a Trappist monk vowed to everlasting silence. To a politician, this naturally was worse than "dreaming" he had died and gone to hell.

The last of the three pills given away by Mr. Honey in his outburst of generosity he gave as a headache cure to an elderly Dowager Countess who admired, or said she admired, his literary work. The lady afterward complained that the pill had made her "dream" that she was the celebrated giant Goliath at about the time Goliath met with one of the younger generation, a lad named David, the local sling champion. David did nothing to ameliorate the Dowager's headache—rather the contrary, in fact. She said that the pills did not agree with her, and shed some of her admiration for Mr. Honey's writing.

So he abandoned the practice of giving away the pills.

"These people can't take it—or the pills, either. Queer pasts they seem to have had—unless they were really my pasts. Probably they were. In that case I may as well enjoy—bah!—my own pasts!" he said one evening as he sat looking at the pill-bottle.

"After all, I suppose it's a habit one has to get used to." He threw the end of his cigarette away and tilted out a pill. In a way he hoped that it might take him back to an incarnation in which he had been Louis the Fifteenth of France. Hope, after all, is both lawful and inexpensive—and Louis' girl-friend Madame du Barry had always exercised a curious fascination for Mr. Honey.

But as it chanced, the Du Barry did not put in an appearance that evening—Mr. Honey awoke to a somewhat sterner love-affair than that of Louis XV and Madame.

HE swallowed a glass of port, then the pill, then another port and lay back at his ease. At least, he thought he was lying back at his ease but within a space of seconds he perceived himself to be mistaken—for, as his head cleared, he discovered that he



He had steamed up nearly to his speed limit, when he heard a sound behind him.... Wolves!

Make Nice Pets

An Adventure in Transmigration, by BERTRAM ATKEY

was lying back against one of the hardest rocks he had ever felt. Nor was it merely hard, it was knobby and it was veneered with ice. He noted that he was clad in an abbreviated fur shirt—far too abbreviated for comfort, for the air was cold enough to crack a thermometer.

He leaped to his feet like a man on springs, took one swift glance at a pallid sun which was low in the western sky, and at a swiftish trot headed north along a rocky track. In one hand he carried a species of ax—a sharp-edged bit of chipped flint bound with sinew into the cleft end of a haft of wood. In the other hand he carried a strip of frozen meat at which he gnawed as he went. On his back he bore a skin sack.

His eyes, as he glanced continually at the sinking sun, were anxious—for he was now a dweller in the age which we know as the Paleolithic, and that was not a good age in which to spend a midwinter night outside of a cave, even in the low altitude of the plains. And Mr. Honey was not in the altitude of the plains. Far from it. He was about nine thousand feet up on the mountainside and he had a long way to go in the very short time which remained before darkness and the first breath of a coming blizzard was already whispering in his chilled ears.

Not that he was worried—but a little anxious, yes. He had made the trip before and, just as he had done today, he had paused after crossing the Ridge for a little sleep. But he had never before slept quite so long. Had he shaved things a little too fine?

He was gaiting along at a definitely smart clip and the bulging skin bag that hung by a strap across his shoulder was weighing a lot more heavily than it seemed to weigh when he had started from home, full-fed, a couple of days before. He halted a second to readjust it, then hurried on, slapping his horny-soled bare feet down on to the rocky track in serious earnest.

He muttered something about the bag as he went, and presently halted with his hands raised as though he intended to slip it off, leave it behind and get along in a higher gear.

But he did not do so. Instead he laughed, rather a grim, sardonic laugh, shouted something insulting to a big



The Bishop "dreamed" he had been Balaam's ass.

condor-like bird that, overhead, was effortlessly following his course down the narrow, precipice-bordered track, in a companionable kind of way, and pushed on.

"I know of no man who ever visited the tribe of the Bough-swingers without presents and lived to tell the tale," he muttered. "Nor any lover who brought away a bride from among them without first paying down the ready *shugar** for her!"

And he was right. The tribe of the Bough-swingers from whom he was expecting shortly to collect the lady he loved (in the Paleolithic manner) were, after their primitive fashion, pretty good business men.

They knew Hob—indeed, they were unusually well acquainted with him. But they were not in the habit of trusting a man of another tribe merely because they knew him. They were very practical people—as people had to be in those far-distant days. "Fair words and hearty promises produce no flint axes," was one of their everyday proverbs. "Show us the shugar—

—
**Shugar* was the word they used in the Paleolithic age when they meant what we mean when we say "money." Their money was not the pure milled-edge coin nor the prettily printed paper so popular with us. It was many things—in Mr. Honey's case, in this incarnation, it consisted of about three-quarters of a hundredweight of amber, of turquoise-matrix, of mother-of-pearl shell and rough gold nuggets, designed for the more ostentatious forms of decorations.
—Bertram.

don't word-paint it!" was another. Some of their descendants, thousands of years later, settled in Missouri. . . .

Hob knew that he had to deliver his sack of goods or come away minus his bride and possibly minus a good deal of his personal anatomy as well.

So he pushed on down the track pretty cheerfully, skirting the precipices, and side-stepping the slippery spots with the sureness of a mountain goat.

It was just as the lower rim of the red sun touched the jagged horizon, and Hob slowed down crossing with great caution a ledge no more than a few inches wide which hung over a thousand feet of sheer precipice that the huge bird of prey made a pass at him and all but got him. But Hob was expecting this and was ready. He grabbed a lucky hand-hold and gave the bird the flint ax on its flat skull. These prehistoric gentlemen did not miss much that they aimed at. Dimly the Paleolithic condor regretted its impulsiveness for as long as it takes a condor with concussion to fall a thousand feet.

Hob grinned faintly and completed his crossing of the most dangerous part of the ledge.

THE path widened quickly now and the downhill going was much easier. This was just as well, for the icy dusk was now close at hand. An occasional snowflake, not larger than a smallish sea-gull, sailed silently past Hob now, increasing slowly in numbers. These flakes were no more than slight hints but Hob knew that what they hinted at was something more like an avalanche than a snowstorm as we understand the word.

He had steamed up very nearly to his speed limit when he heard a thin sound far behind him which stopped him dead in his tracks, listening—listening, body and soul.

Wolves!

He acted fast—he had to. He slipped off the bag, which went rolling over the precipice, and went forward groping in his pouch for a bit of skin and some sinews. As he ran he knotted the sinew round the fur into the form of a rough lumpy ball. Then, still running, he gashed his arm with his flint ax and soaked the skin with blood. In



The politician "dreamed" he was a Trappist Monk.

a few minutes he reached the spot he wanted—a place where the sheer precipice had yielded to a steep slope. He stopped, permitted himself to bleed a little on the edge of the track, smeared it about with the soaked ball and started the ball rolling irregularly down the slope. He swiftly bound a bit of skin over the wound. Then he took a mighty leap up to a rock on his left hand and desperately struggled along the face of the rocky wall for a few dozen yards.

Then he dropped to the track again and began to hurry in real earnest. He was accustomed to speeding—one did that from childhood upward in those days; he was going downhill; and he had a pack of wolves behind him.

He was now moving at a rate which made it difficult to see whether his feet actually touched the ground more than once in about ten yards or not. He looked as if he was on the point of "taking off" from an airdrome—as if he might soar into the air at any moment. His ears were set back like a hare's, so that he decreased the wind resistance to that extent and moreover could nicely estimate the volume of the observations of the wolf-pack behind him. These were dying down slightly—naturally enough, for in the first flush of his enthusiasm Hob could have outstripped practically anything but one of the latest models of single-seat fighters. Yet, fast as he was going, he notched up a record at the sudden clamor that outraged the air when the wolves reached the bloodstained point from which the ball of skin had started down the slope.

Then the howlings died away. . . . They had followed the blood scent.

HALF an hour later in pitch darkness Hob scrambled over the high stockade round the forest clearing in which the tribe of the Bough-swingers had their village, shouting his name and his pacific intentions very loudly indeed.

It was quite dark by the time Hob reached the relative safety of the stockade and most of the Bough-swingers had gone to bed—as they understood the art of going to bed. It was an extremely simple business. When bedtime arrived they stopped sitting about on the chilly ground and climbed up trees. The rich crawled into little tree huts made of sticks and dried grass and reeds; the poor sat in forks and crotches; lovers did the best they could. All seemed satisfied.

As Hob landed over the stockade two hefty shadows slid down the trunk of a big beech tree at rather dizzy speed, armed with enormous stone-headed clubs or bats and interviewed him.

"Be not alarmed, brothers. It is but Hob of the Clams come to collect his bride, the beautiful Lumpee," said Hob very swiftly, for the Bough-swingers were bat-sharps of no mean order.

Recognizing him, they grunted that he was lucky to have got there and returned to their bedrooms up the beech.

Hob thanked them for their hearty welcome, and picked himself a tree—the one which he fancied Lumpee slept up. Evidently his fancy was wrong or Lumpee had recently changed trees for Hob spent the night with a tame bear cub which the Chief of the Bough-swingers was teaching to retrieve. The bear cub was as friendly to Hob as Hob was to it and he did not trouble to select another tree. He fitted himself into a fork and after reflecting for a few minutes on the unromantic beginning to his expedition, fell asleep.

Next morning, after a moderate breakfast of post-dated venison, ber-



ries, roots and a nut or two the Council of Elders, having sent the young men out to hunt game and the young women out to pick eatables off eatable-bearing bushes, sat on Hob's case.

The Chief spoke first.

"You have come hither from the seashore tribe of the Clams to pay for and to bear away your betrothed—Lumpee, the daughter of Humph?"

"Yes," admitted Hob.

"The price is already agreed with Humph?"

"Yes," said Hob, rather slowly.

"What says Humph?"

"Humph!" said Humph, a grim parent, who rarely said anything else.

"It is well!" said the Chief. "Produce the price, Hob."

Hob, his eyes anxiously on the smiling lady, began to explain.

"The price—yes, of course. I brought it—a good price, a noble price, a price worthy of Lumpee—I brought it away from my home. But alas, being chased by wolves, I deemed it prudent to ease my burden by depositing the sack containing the price in a safe place."

All smiles vanished.

"You have not the price?" rose a shrill wire-drawn voice—Lumpee's.

"Well, no—yes, I have it—but not on me—not actually *with* me, so to say!"

"Humph!" said Humph.

THE Chief of the Bough-swingers knotted his brows, staring.

"You say that you have *not*—nay, let us be clear upon this matter. There was an agreed price for this beautiful daughter of the Bough-swingers for marriage purposes? Is that correct?"

"Yes, correct, O Chief, and superbly put," admitted Hob.

"You have come now to fetch away Lumpee?"

"It is even so," said Hob.

"But you have not brought the sugar—saying instead that you hid it because you were chased by a pack of wolves."

"Yes."

"For so trifling a thing—for are we not *always* being chased about by wolves? So you have the unparalleled crust to appear here demanding a wife *on credit*!"

Lumpee began to scream with anger, horror, disgust, humiliation, disappointment, mortification and a number of other things.

"Silence your offspring, Humph!" commanded the Chief.

Humph silenced her and replaced his club on the ground.

"This is a very grievous affront to the Bough-swingers!" stated the Chief. "Since when have outlanders believed us so low that we are willing to supply them with free wives?"

"It is an insult!" said a huge grim-looking and muscular Bough-swinger called Beetle-brow, who was leaning upon his stone-topped club, next to Lumpee with one arm round her not unwilling waist.

The Council nodded solemnly in union.

Hob bowed and salaamed respectfully several times. When he had finished bowing he was a good deal nearer the stockade than he had been.

The Chief seemed suddenly to lose his judicial calm.

"You come here as bold as a saber-toothed tiger but empty-handed, and tell us a tale like that!" he bellowed. "Evidently you conceive us to be fools! You say you were chased here by

Dimly the condor regretted its impulsiveness.

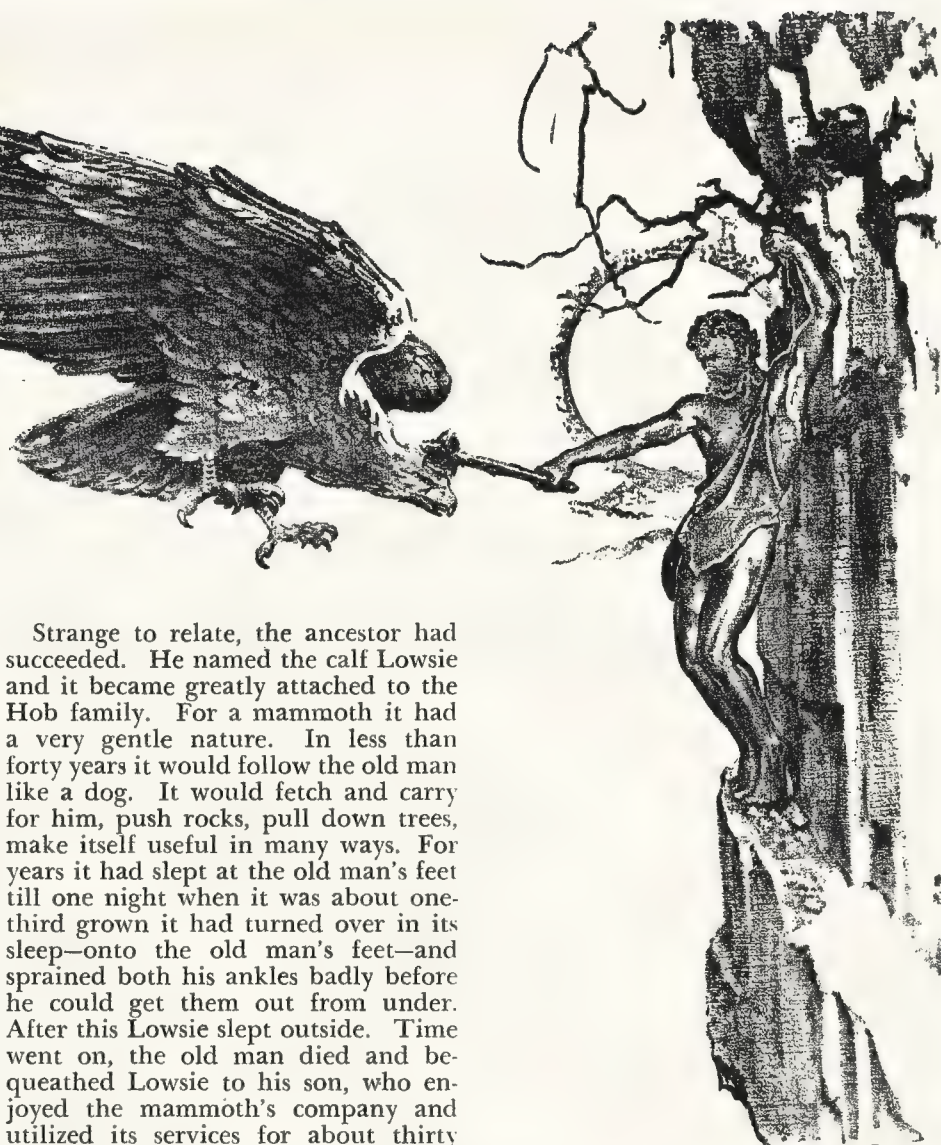
wolves! By the eternal rocks, if there were men present worth their salt you would think you were being chased hence by cave-hyenas!"

The big Bough-swinger by Lumpee lurched forward—but he was slow. Hob was over the stockade and on his way like a scalded cat. He paused for a second at the top of the stockade to utter a truly bloodcurdling threat.

"I go now—yea. But I will return and destroy the whole tribe of you, root and bough!" he stated shortly—and left, touching only the high spots. He may have been short of shugar, but he had plenty of speed.

SOMETHING well over a hundred years before, Hob's great-great-grandfather, a famous hunter, had been trailing a huge cow-mammoth when the vast creature by some accident or misjudgment had got itself out on the frozen surface of a swamp, followed by its calf.

The frozen crust had broken, letting the mammoth through. It disappeared instantly. But the weight of the small calf made no impression on the ice and after a wait of some hours, the baby mammoth, hungry, cold, bewildered, had fallen an easy prisoner to the patient old hunter watching it. It was fortunate for the calf that the tribe chanced at that period to be overstocked, if possible, with food. A couple of enormous woolly rhinoceroses had fought each to a double finish just outside the village the day before; a dead whale had stranded on the beach a week before; and for miles the same beach was strewn with the carcasses of about half a million of cod which had thrown themselves out of the water, high above tidemark, in frantic flight from a school of vast cod-eating sharks that infested round about there at that period. The tribe of the Clams therefore was so foodful that they could only see with difficulty and they took no interest in the tiny mammoth. Ordinarily they would have barbecued him before he was well inside the village; now they agreed good-humoredly with Hob's ancestor when he stated that he was going to rear the baby mammoth and bring him up as a kind of pet—use him for riding, pulling or pushing objects and so on.



Strange to relate, the ancestor had succeeded. He named the calf Lowsie and it became greatly attached to the Hob family. For a mammoth it had a very gentle nature. In less than forty years it would follow the old man like a dog. It would fetch and carry for him, push rocks, pull down trees, make itself useful in many ways. For years it had slept at the old man's feet till one night when it was about one-third grown it had turned over in its sleep—onto the old man's feet—and sprained both his ankles badly before he could get them out from under. After this Lowsie slept outside. Time went on, the old man died and bequeathed Lowsie to his son, who enjoyed the mammoth's company and utilized its services for about thirty years. Then, in turn he passed on the now fully grown mammoth. And so it had gone on and on, generation by generation, till the mighty animal had been inherited by Hob.

Lowsie was round about a hundred and fifty years old at this period, and more than all the members of the Hob dynasty he had known and by whom he had been owned, he loved the present holder of the Hob title. He had grown into a fine mammoth, five tons or so, maybe a little more or slightly less,* and he would obey the least whisper or sign of Hob like a trained seal. He was a grand pet and he cost nothing—he fed himself in the woods. Hob would not run from a pack of wolves if he had Lowsie with him—it was the wolves who performed the running on these occasions. Even the mighty cave-bear or the huge, ferocious and haughty saber-tooth tiger looked the other way and failed to notice Hob or Lowsie when they met. Indeed, in their haughty, absent-minded way they usually climbed a tree or ducked

*Call it six tons. I am not the kind of party to grudge readers of the BLUE BOOK a ton of mammoth. —Bertram.

over a precipice. Lowsie was well over twelve feet high; his gleaming white tusks were eight or nine feet long and could have hooked an ordinary elephant of these days pretty well up to the Milky Way; his trunk was like a waterspout and he was covered with dirt-colored wool.

AND this was the pet which gamboled clumsily forth to meet his beloved owner when the still furious Hob, a few days after his interview with the Bough-swinger Council, came home again.

"Hello, Lowsie—good Lowsie!" said Hob, patting the vast beast somewhere just about the knee joint. It was like patting a pillar in a cathedral. Lowsie gently curled his trunk end around Hob and lifted him up on his back.

"They have insulted your Boss, Lowsie, and you have got the job of avenging him," said Hob viciously, as they headed for the village of the Clams.

Lowsie wagged a tail the size of a medium bolster. Although he was probably the only really docile mam-

moth ever known in the history of mankind, his habit of obedience, ingrained over a period of a hundred and fifty years, was greater even than his natural and acquired docility. If the Boss said, "Obliterate the Bough-swingers," Lowsie was entirely willing to oblige, for he loved the Boss who, in the mammoth's low-gear'd mind was the kindest, most generous Boss in the world. Quite frequently Lowsie had known him say: "Go now and get your dinner, Lowsie—eat hearty, as much and as long as you like!" The mammoth's favorite food was the tender tips of the pine boughs, and there were millions of pine trees about. Probably Lowsie labored under the delusion that these trees were Hob's personal property, and he was in a dim-witted way extremely grateful, or appreciative, of Hob's generosity. He was a fine specimen of a mammoth physically, but mentally his lights were a little low. Even the occasional lady mammoth he met in the vast pine forest when taking his daily snack of fifty bushels of turpentine foliage meant very little to Lowsie, for, judged by modern standards, he was sexed to about the same degree as a General Grant tank. His sex rating was somewhere round about zero on any reliable thermometer. Hence, probably, his unnatural docility. He was, of course, still very young and inexperienced—for a mammoth.

IT did not take Hob very long to equip himself for the projected mopping-up of the avaricious Bough-swingers.

He remained at home only long enough to amass a pile of dried meat, to select a spare flint ax for himself, a flint jabber or goad for Lowsie's benefit, and he was off again—lingering only to inquire whether anybody had any farewell messages for the Bough-swingers.

They went a long way round to avoid the mountain tracks, so that it was a week before they were within reasonable scouting distance of the stockade in the trees. Here Hob

halted, gave Lowsie permission to eat for awhile, and, for himself, proceeded to do a spot of Paleolithic scouting.

Shuffling silently up to the stockade which the Bough-swingers had so intelligently erected between themselves and the outside world he paused to listen. It was dusk and evidently the hunters had done well that day, for judging from the volume of conversation going on within the stockade everybody was contented with the kind of relaxed contentment which usually results from a hearty supper. A few moments listening-in acquainted Hob with the fact that somebody had killed a large specimen of the Great Irish Elk that morning and that everybody had eaten him that evening. They were now gossiping as they digested.

It was not long before Hob heard his own name mentioned—by the voice of Beetle-brow, the rough who had chased him over the stockade and far beyond it.

"Yes, that was the fellow—Hob. Hob of the Clams. He came hither as bold as—as a boulder rolling down the slope of a steep hill, demanding my girl Lumpee as his bride. 'Very good and well,' said the Chief. 'A price was agreed for the maiden?'"

"'Yes,' said this Hob.

"'Produce the price!' said the Chief; and believe it or not the Clam had it not—had nothing in fact. Said so—explained he had been chased by wolves and had to throw the price into the chasm! Sounds mad—but it is true. Is it not true, Lump, old lady?"

"'Absolutely,'" confirmed Lump, contemptuously. "He had nothing but the last year's skin he stood up in!"

"The Chief asked him if he thought the Bough-swingers were in the business of supplying free wives to forerunners, and that was hint enough for

me. I got my club into the 'ready' position and Hob must have seen it for he went over the stockade like a Stone Age kangaroo gone frantic! And that was the last seen of him. Lumpee naturally disowned him on the spot—and I got together the necessary shugar and paid the price for her then and there. So she's mine now—that so, Lump, old lady?"

"Absolutely," confirmed Lump again.

"And now," resumed Beetle-brow, "if ever that wolf-haunted clout of a Clam comes sneaking around here again I will so deal with the front of his face that ever thereafter he shall fail to distinguish it from the back of his head!"

"For myself, I have never liked the Clams. There is something fishy about them!" said a voice.

"I ask you, what kind of a man but a Clam would expect a wife like the beautiful Lump *bukshee*, free gratis and for nothing!" said another voice.

"The Clams are not true men, they are a kind of salt monkey that lives in the cliff caves and eats seaweed," declared a third conversationalist.

HOB left; he felt he had heard all he required. He found his way back to Lowsie—and his Stone Age language would have startled anything but a zero-witted mammoth.

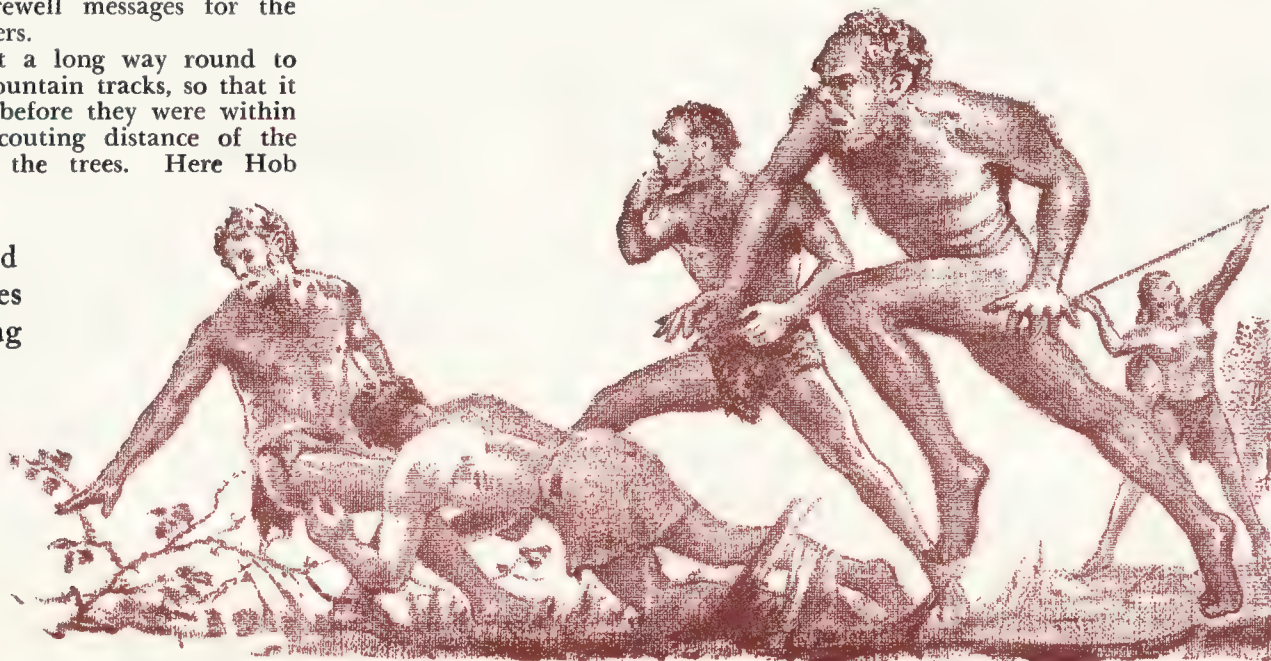
"Tomorrow at dawn, Lowsie—tomorrow at dawn!" he hissed. "Lie down, you, and keep the wind off me!"

He crept snarling into the lee of the monster, and was instantly asleep.

But he was awake at the first peep of dawn, his fury increased rather than abated by a good night's rest.

"You are today going into action for the first time, Lowsie, good mammoth, under my command. Mark that—under my command! You will destroy

Illustrated
by Charles
Chickering



the village and all within it. You will pull down all trees in which Bough-swingers seek shelter and the denizens of these trees you will trample. All folk who run away you will catch and pull apart! Is that clear? Good! I will now mount!"

He mounted the huge beast like a man mounting a tank.

"Start, Lowsie!" he commanded.

It was, of course, easy.

THE peace-loving mammoth only required a fairly generous application of the flint goad to believe that Hob meant what he said.

He charged forward, going through the stockade as if it were cotton wool. He uprooted trees like a hungry man uprooting radishes. He shook Bough-swingers out of said trees and destroyed them, as ordered by the now raving Hob. He caught fleeing Bough-swingers and mowed them down. He went baresark and tried to plow up solid rock with his tusks, breaking one off and bending the other. This gave him a kind of toothache and he became all but uncontrollable, so that, having obliterated all the Bough-swingers he could see, he decided to charge a small cliff of pure rock just outside the wood. It was quite a small cliff—probably only weighed about two hundred and seventy thousand tons. Still, it was good close-grained rock—and it all but concertinaed the murderous mammoth. It stretched him flat. If Hob had not slid down over his tail just in time it would have concussed him crazy.

When presently Lowsie returned to consciousness he was much less wild. He felt ill and bilious and sulky. Nothing but a lifelong habit of obedience would have forced him so mechanically to respond to a screamed order by Hob to pursue two figures which were moving toward the horizon at a truly remarkable speed—the figures of Lumpee and Beetle-brow.

Wearily, the rock-stricken, granite-drunk tank rolled after them.

Even in his lowest gear it only took the mammoth a minute or two to catch them. They parted and ran wide of each other as the thundering monster's snaky trunk reached for them. It was the man that Lowsie grabbed, threw down and trampled.

Hob turned to shout to the staring and horrified girl.

"Ho, Lumpee! Said I not that I would return and render extinct all the tribe of Bough-swingers! Wait there for me—wait—"

He broke off as Lowsie gave a very unusual lurch and the southwest corner of him sank suddenly. Hob saw at once what had happened. Lowsie had caught the fugitives at the wrong spot and trampled Beetle-brow just a trifle too enthusiastically.

They were on a frozen quicksand and the ponderously pounding feet and great weight of the mammoth had broken the icy crust.

With a furious trumpeting, Lowsie exerted his full colossal strength and tore his leg free—only to sink another leg deeper still. Then both forelegs went through. The doomed mammoth was sinking fast.

Hob glared round him measuring the area of jagged cakes of broken ice across which he must jump to the safety of the firm ice when Lowsie sank deep enough.

A flint-headed spear went whizzing past his head. The girl Lumpee was out to avenge her people. She ran round the wreckage to recover the weapon, screaming a few of the things she intended to do to Hob if and when he leaped from the sinking Lowsie. But she was wasting her breath.

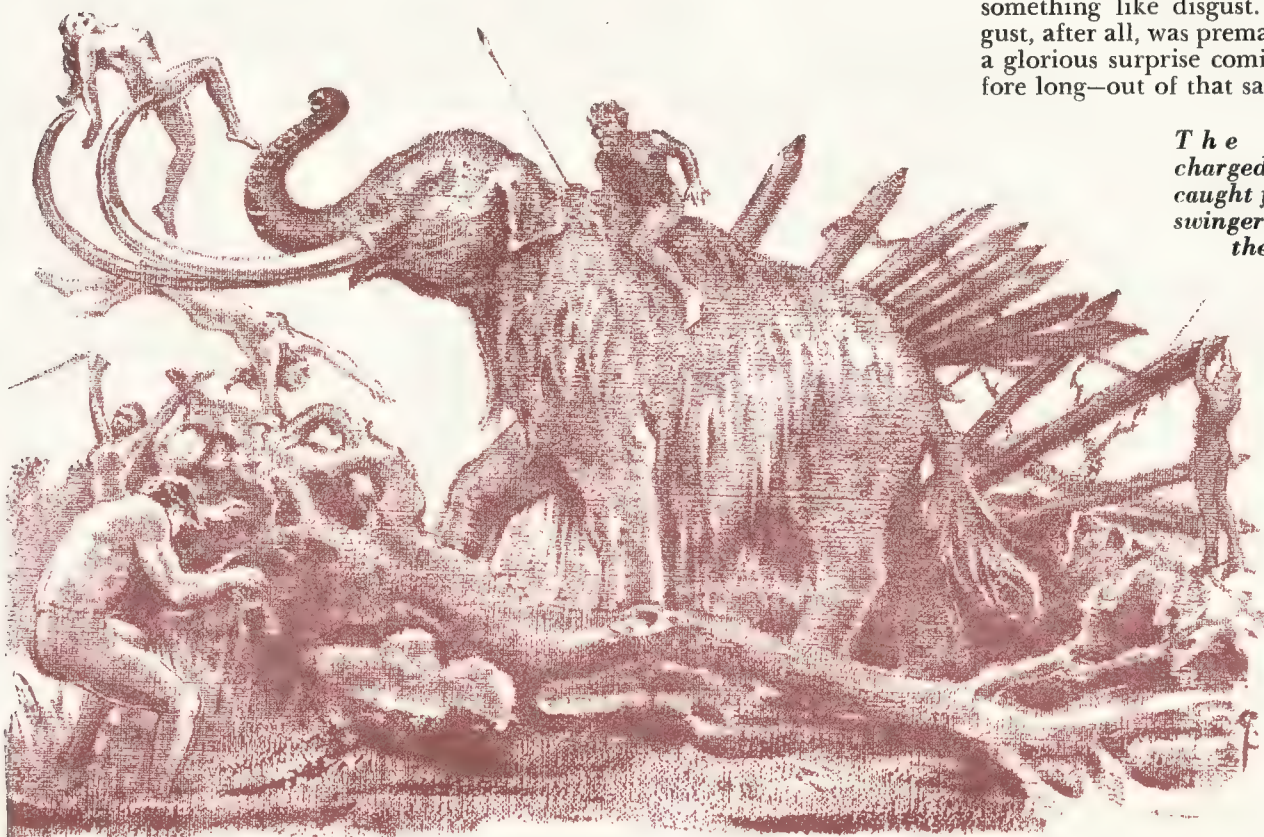
Hob saw two husky survivors from the village, their spears and axes ready, racing up. They had seen Tank No. One's disaster from their hiding-places. Then, even as he realized that he was doomed, the forefront of the mammoth sank several feet so that it was from a steeply sloping platform that Hob desperately jumped—practically straight into the curled end of the huge flailing trunk. The mammoth clung to Hob like a forlorn hope—which he was.

Then suddenly the mammoth roared and went under, taking Hob with him. At least he would have gone the whole distance with Lowsie if at that moment he had not returned to this life and these days in the apartment of Mr. Hobart Honey.

OUTSIDE, a motor bus in need of workshop attention was roaring down the street like—like a mammoth or a tank. . . .

Mr. H. took two large glasses of port in quick succession. Then he said "Hah!" and poured a third. He drank it slowly, eying the bottle of pills with something like disgust. But his disgust, after all, was premature. He had a glorious surprise coming to him before long—out of that same bottle.

The mammoth charged forward. He caught fleeing Bough-swingers and mowed them down.



CRUSOE



"Hello!" called Brent.
"Thought you were a
Jap!"



HARLEY BRENT was walking down Turbigo Boulevard and heading for his hotel, when he sighted Macartney and came to a dead halt of incredulous amazement.

"As I live and breathe!" he exclaimed in delight. "Jock Macartney, the New Zealand

Hercules! How in the name of creation did you get here to Noumea?"

"Swam," replied Mac. He was six feet three, broad in proportion, florid and hearty. He grinned widely as he pumped Brent's hand. "How'd you get here yourself?"

"Hush! Got sent as a convict. I'm on parole. Last I saw of you was at Surabaya before the Nips threw us out. Come on to the hotel bar."

"Good-o," said Mac. "Matter of fact, I'm here on Gov't business."

"And I'm on sick leave," said Brent. "Yes, darn you, I am! Got fever in Java."

"Gov't sent me here because I speak French, after a fashion," said Macartney.

There was reason for mutual surprise; and on Brent's part for skepticism. He was one of the few people who guessed what might happen here very shortly, and wondered if Mac had any suspicion of it; he soon was set at rest on this head. But not even Brent guessed the full truth.

When the United States occupation came to New Caledonia, it came like a thunderbolt, and necessarily so. This occupation would mean little to the world at large; to the



world of the South Pacific it would come as a staggering thing; and to the Japanese, as a calamity. This Free French island northeast of Australia was to the Pacific what Madagascar was to the Indian ocean, and far more. Its intrinsic wealth of minerals was even greater than its strategic value, which was enormous.

Charley Brent had done good work both as correspondent and public relations officer. After the bad debacle of Java, he got to Port Darwin with a touch of fever in his bones and sick leave due. He got the leave. A Headquarters friend told him a French island boat was just leaving for Noumea

of the CORAL SEA

It's global war indeed when an American, an Australian, a Swedish girl, a White Russian and the Japanese come together in strange conflict on a little island off New Caledonia.

by Gordon Keyne

and advised the voyage for his health—with a surreptitious wink. He took the voyage.

Since the Free French who held the island were all-out friendly, Brent enjoyed himself for three days, motoring to Burail, Poya and similar towns and visiting the old convict hell at Ile Nou and other points about the enormous harbor that looked like a lake enclosed by barren mountains.

After that, the terrific tension began to get his nerves. Port Noumea had all the vibratory effect of a beehive, what with rumors and suspense. Some refugees from the Dutch islands had reached here, and the large element of Javanese in the population were hysterical. The island Japs had been rounded up, but Japanese planes had already appeared over the island group, the invading wave of barbarism might hit at any moment; things were tight.

Then Brent ran into the New Zealander, whom he had known as a correspondent for Anzac press groups, and the relaxation was joyous. It became perfect in the air-conditioned bar of the Hotel de Paris.

"I've been down at Kone the past couple of days. That's the nickel-mining center, you know," said Mac. "Trying to locate a chap. No luck. Now I've got a boat moored at the quay here, three ex-convict Frenchmen for a crew and an infernal side trip to make. Pulling out at the crack of dawn. May take a day, may take two; dashed important Gov'ment business. What say? Glad to have company; can't promise much in the way of thrills, except spiders."

"Spiders?" repeated Brent, and the other grinned.

"Right. This phosphate island is famous for its spiders; big ones, big as your hand, but harmless. Wimpole Island, a hundred-odd miles east of Point Goro." Mac gulped his drink. "A mere pin-prick in the infinity of ocean. May take two days getting there; may be there half an hour, maybe longer."

"Two days? Let me think," said Charley Brent.

He was not a large man, ever so much smaller than Macartney, but he made up for it. He was agile, not too conventional, with a quick and merry brown eye and bony, regular features marred by a Hollywood hairline mustache that was a nuisance to keep trim and lent him a deceptive air of prissy neatness. He was neither neat nor prissy.

DARED he leave for two or three days? He guessed something big was up; what, he could not tell. That Noumea was to be occupied with the consent of its authorities, he could not guess, of course; but this was going to be a news center very shortly.

As he drew at his cigarette, someone approached their table. He glanced up and saw a young woman, intent upon Macartney. She halted and spoke abruptly, in English.

"Oh! Are you Mr. Macartney?"

Both men rose. "Yes, miss," replied the New Zealander.

"Were you at Kone looking for Odd Lundquist? Is that your boat at the wharf, leaving tomorrow for Wimpole Island?" she demanded almost breathlessly. Macartney's sleepy eyes came alive as though with inner excitement.

"Yes, miss, yes! Will you sit down?"

"Oh, I'm so glad I found you!" She dropped into a chair, with a nod as Mac introduced Charley Brent, and a quick breath of relief escaped her. She was slim, with a mass of pale yellow hair above a tanned face of angular lines, wide gray eyes, wide and generous mouth. "I'm Stella Lundquist—Odd's sister."

"Oh!" said Macartney. Caution, almost hostility, flickered in his gaze. She surveyed him, flashed one comprehensive glance at Brent, then centered her whole attention again on Macartney.

"Why didn't you come to me direct, or write?" she rapped out. "I've been at the farm up in Colonist Valley, only twelve miles out of town."

"Do you know where your brother is?" Macartney demanded. She met his gaze with more open hostility.

"What of it? Whom do you represent?"

"New Zealand Gov'ment," said Mac.

"Easy to say. Prove it if you want to talk with me."

"Who said I did?" Macartney pried loose a smile, however, and produced some letters. He selected one and handed it to her. She glanced at it and returned it.

"Seems correct. First, I want to go to the island with you. I must."

"Don't be absurd, please," Macartney rejoined.

Her gray eyes darted at him.

"So? Well, suppose you tell me what it is you want."

"I want him."

"Yes. And you can't find him and never will! What's more, I know what it is you want aside from him. And I know where it is. You'll never find it."

"I have my doubts about that," said the New Zealander.

"I haven't," she rejoined coolly. "Here's your chance; take it or lose it. Do I go with you?"

Mac eyed her for a moment, and yielded. "Very well. But it's no trip for a woman."

"I've been there before. Agreed, then." She rose. "When do you leave?"

"Tide's on the ebb at five, they tell me. We leave then."

"I'll be there. Thanks." She broke into a quick, flashing smile that transfigured her high-boned features. "*Au revoir!*"

She was gone. The men settled back into their chairs.

"Have you thought it over?" asked Mac. Charley Brent put his fingers to his lips and blew a kiss to heaven.

"Mac, did you see that smile? Wow! You couldn't keep me from going! But what's it all about? Where does she come in?"

"Let's have a quick one and walk down to the wharf."

They had the quick one and were on their way. Macartney seemed ill at ease and thoughtful, as though shaping what he had to say. Brent did not press him.

The westering sun was bidding the city come awake after its siesta, and the streets were thronged, the odd frontless shops were taking on life. Against the main background of white-clad Frenchmen and Javanese or Annamite house-servants, the gendarmes and sailors, the laughing brown or near-brown women, stood out occasional refugees from the

war zone—Dutchmen, for the most part, despairing lost souls who had seen their whole world blown to bits.

Over the harbor hills dust hung in the air, dust from the huge construction jobs being suddenly and frantically pushed forward with all available labor. What these were, no one knew or would say, but Charley Brent could guess. Air-fields and defenses—help was coming to these Free French of the Pacific, whose once infamous penal colony had now become a cornerstone in the fight for freedom.

Except for small craft, lighters and a few inter-island steamers sheltered here from the war lanes, the harbor stretched vast and empty. They came to the immense stone quay that fronted the town for half a mile. A throng of gabbling fishermen were busied about the landing-stairs. Macartney turned and looked up at the mounting streets of the city, whose flat-surfaced roofs glinted whitely over the one-story structures that were almost lost amid the trees, to the administrative buildings on the hill, backed by the great stone cathedral with its square tower.

"A hell of a place! But it gets you," he said. "Think of all this founded on convict labor!"

"Like Australia," put in Brent.

The other grunted. "I'm not an Aussie, you blooming idiot! Yes, this place gets you; there's a quiver of energy about it, there's a queer pulse of life in it. Plenty of energy in the mountains, too; those Caledonickel people are doing things up in the hills."

"And making money, these war times."

"You and your money, Yank! There's our craft, up ahead past the cranes."

Brent looked at the stout, heavy boat with her single spar, half deck and engine. A dirty craft but strong, her inner rail topped by the conical wooden buffers necessary to keep her clear of the coral ledge that projected below the quay.

"What about grub and water?" he asked.

"I'm buying plenty. One of the three Frenchies owns her; he's the skipper. Pleasant fellow, too, once you get



under his skin. Well, about this chap-Lundquist, now. He was the last manager of the works at Wimpole Island. A New Zealand company had and has a concession for the exploitation of the phosphates there. Hasn't done well in late years."

"And your Government has taken it over?"

"Precisely. Lundquist disappeared a year or so ago. Japanese interests had been in touch with him. It's suspected that he looted the place, selling the phosphates to passing Jap vessels and leaving little for the company. Records and money disappeared with him, and due to the war and so forth no satisfaction could be got out of the French people. Last heard of him he went to Kone. That's why I followed him there, but he had disappeared from there six or seven months back. No savvy nothing. Vaguely supposed to be dead, and so forth."

"You didn't know he had a farm and a sister?"

"Sure. But he was not around there and the farm's in her name. I left her alone quite purposely. No proof that he was a crook, but things look shady. I'm heading for the island to check up on things there and report."



"Folks, let me present Jim King," said Brent. "I know nothing about him, except that he seems *non compos mentis*."

"Out in this part of the world, crooks seem to be weak, usually. She's not. Is the island inhabited?"

"Only by spiders. It has a bad name, apparently; hard to get people to go there, even, like our crew. Mutter, mutter, whisper, whisper—you know how it goes! Nothing definite. The authorities laugh at any such talk, as usual. So, like a sap, you think the sister is on the level because she has a nice smile!"

"Don't you?"

Mac grimaced with sardonic scorn.

"Her brother's hiding out. I've missed him close, she's scared I'll find him, and now she's doing a decoy act. She wants to go along to make us believe some fantastic yarn."

"Nope; that's prejudice speaking," Brent said solemnly. "You should have an open mind. If Stella were pretty,

I'd agree with you; one should always suspect a pretty girl. But she's not. She's a peach, and when she smiles—oh, boy! She smacks you right between the eyes. My snap judgment of a woman is never wrong, which is why I remain a bachelor at the ripe age of twenty-four. Heed it well."

"You be blowed!" said Mac. "You're the type of guy who makes the world safe for gold-diggers. Why, I'd not be surprised if she had just been trying to screw information out of me! I'd not be surprised if she never showed up in the morning!"

But she did. She came down to the quay in a dog-cart driven by an old Frenchman who was obviously an ex-convict; and she came aboard with a worn old canvas duffel-bag slung over her shoulder, asking help from no man.

CHAPTER TWO



O Charley Brent, who loved sailing and was seldom troubled by *mal de mer*, this was a glorious morning's work, with a fresh breeze blowing and the not too aptly named *Hiron-delle* tumbling along with her lee rail afoam.

Once past Ile Nou and out of the harbor, she scudded down the maze of channels and reefs and islets that edged the coast to the southern tip of New Caledonia, whose great fringing reef ran at times thirty miles seaward. It was noon before she was through the Ile Wen channel and straightening out eastward into the unbroken sea.

Macartney remained to himself, taciturn and gloomy; if not actually seasick he was so close to it as to be like a bear with a sore head. The three Frenchmen of the crew were ragged, bearded, cheerful fellows, the skipper displaying certain vestiges of ancient gentility; their knowledge of the reefs and passages was intimate. They spoke no English, and Brent, whose French was rudimentary, very gladly found himself flung upon the company of Stella Lundquist.

"You know, we might just as well get off to a good friendly start," he observed, joining her under the lee of the bows, where a pile of fish-nets and old tarpaulins softened the hardness of the deck.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Oh, I'm naturally a friendly pup. Then you're stimulating, as a good-looking woman always is to an unattached man in a strange land. You have character and I like you and I'm curious," he went on cheerfully, undeterred by the chilly flick of her gray eyes. "To find a Swede girl farming in this lost corner of creation is something startling. Mac sketched the general outlines of your brother's story but said nothing more about you folks. Tell me about your farm. What do you raise?"

She laughed. Stretched out on the canvas, supported by one elbow, she was quite at her ease to the pitch and toss of the deck. She wore shirt and reefer jacket and heavy slacks, a Javanese turban confining her masses of hair.

"Cows, fodder, dairy products," she said. "We have huge kauri pines at one end of the farm and coconut palms at the other. And I'm not a Swede girl, but American."

"How come? Riddle me the riddle!"

"Well, we came out here from Minnesota twelve years ago. Father had an uncle who was captain of a trading ship for a French company and had settled here. He died and left us the farm and his other property; Father took it over. Eight years ago, Father died. My brother, who was six years older than I, carried on—"

She hesitated briefly, as though poised upon unpleasant memories, then went on:

"He was not lucky with the farm; he was after quicker returns. Fortunes can be made in these parts, you know; he dabbled in minerals and deposits and got into the phosphate line. He took his share of our inheritance and I bought him out of the farm, and finally he went down to Wimpole Island as manager, with an interest in the business—and that went from bad to worse. Satisfied now?"

"Not entirely." Brent got his pipe alight. "What was his trouble? Liquor? Galloping bones?"

He did not look at her, but was aware of the swift anger and resentment that swept across her face.

"It was as I said; just bad luck. Some men are like that; some have either good luck or bad in whatever they touch. Odd always hoped for good luck but never had it."

"Let's be frank and say poor judgment. Hm! And you'll never have anything but good luck—I hope." Brent chewed his pipestem. "You're not curious about me, I'm afraid, but just to square things up I'll tell you the story of my life. Since we're going to be friends for a couple of days and I must stand between you and New Zealand wrath, you'd better know all about me."

"Tell me about your friend, Macartney."

"Nope; size him up for yourself. Now, I've got two aunts in Seattle and a mother in Portland and a brother in the Air Corps. I'd be in it myself but Uncle Sam says thumbs down because of defective eyesight, so I've got a public relations job, with a bit of newspaper reporting on the side. I've got no money in the bank but a good swindle sheet to draw on. I'm steady, reliable, of good habits, able to hold my liquor and like it, but apt to go off at unexpected tangents. You know, flighty."

Her gray eyes warmed a trifle.

"Can you swim? I hope so."

"Yes. Why the hope?"

"Because," she replied casually, "these three sailors of yours are no angels. They have liquor aboard. If you take it away, they'll kill you. If they get drunk, they're almost sure to smash up the ship."

"They've never done it yet," said Brent.

"Why, they have too! What do you mean?"

"Not this ship; it's still afloat. We're out at sea; they'll go down too if the ship goes. Besides, we've a small boat."

She laughed, and he could ask nothing better.

UNDER a brisk westerly wind they were bowling along almost on an even keel, and before the day was over, Macartney regained his color and became more sociable.

The *Hirondelle* had a small private cabin aft, which was given up to Stella, and a rather dirty general cabin that served for mess and sleeping, storage and card-playing. The craft was alive with a mingled odor of ancient copra and more ancient fish. One could get away from it only in the stern, while they were before the wind.

"I told you, or should have, that misery loves company," Macartney said that evening. He and Brent were bedded under the quarter rail on hay-filled mattresses. Stella had gone below. "This is no picnic, Yank."

"The grub's elegant," said Brent. "No end of fruit; I like that. However, you've not been enjoying your food, apparently. When do we reach your blessed island?"

"As near as I can get out of the skipper, if the wind holds we should be there by tomorrow afternoon, in time to land before dark."

"Among the spiders?"

"Bosh. There are, or were, buildings; godowns, barracks for workers, manager's bungalow, a wharf for lighters, and so forth. I understand ships were loaded by means of lighters; therefore, they must still be there."

"Boats without humans? Doesn't stand to reason, somehow, Mac; like eggs without ham. I mean, in romantic South Sea stories. And we've got to rescue Stella from death or worse."

"I say, are you cuckoo?" demanded Mac.

"No, just rational. Like the stories, you know, where boy meets girl, saves her from the spiders, and everything ends in marriage, or good as—"

"Look at the stars and go to sleep, you bloody ass."

Brent chuckled and complied. His last waking thought was that the element of romance in such cases was distinctly exaggerated.

His first waking thought confirmed this, when in the first sunrise the *Hirondelle* came about and spilled him and Mac in the scuppers amid a tangle of tarpaulins, with a healthy sea bursting over the rail and swamping them. The bearded rascal at the tiller roared with laughter. They half stripped and poised on the weather rail to catch the sunlight, when Stella appeared, shaking herself.

"Ugh! I'll take the deck after this," she exclaimed furiously. "Cockroaches by the million! Hello! You look wet."

"Looks aren't deceptive," said Mac, and grinned at her. "You don't look wet but you certainly are disheveled, miss. Charley, there's a tin of cigarettes in my duffel down below. Will you get it, like a good chap? I'll visit the galley and fix some tea."

ANOTHER hour saw them dry and cheerful and fed, the dirty old canvas sending them through slapping seas, and the smallboat towing astern without taking a drop aboard. Stella, accepting one of Mac's cigarettes, regarded him with reflective questioning.

"I suppose," she said, without particular animus, "that you regard my brother as an embezzler, a thief?"

"Absolutely not!" said Macartney, looking shocked.

"Well, that was the idea you conveyed. Just why do you want him, then?"

"To obtain the missing records, a settlement of accounts, and so forth. Our Gov'ment has taken over the concession, y' know." Mac hesitated. "Also, there's been a rumor afloat about a strike of a tremendously rich potash deposit he made and supposedly covered up."

"Oh! That, I think, is quite true," she said almost carelessly. She studied her cigarette ash for a moment, then looked up at Mac. "Odd was in a jam, a bad one," she said abruptly. "New Zealand was far away; he could get no help from there. Two of his foremen were Japanese, clever fellows. They knew about this discovery. One of them tried to bribe Odd to keep quiet about it. Things came to blows. He killed one of them; the other cut him up badly and got away."

She paused. The leaping seas, the sunlight, seemed struck with intensity; Brent was fascinated by the play of emotions in her face. Mac listened in startled silence.

"In Noumea, Odd found a murder charge laid against him," she went on. "This island is French soil; you know how pokey the French are about such things. Odd tried to get away on a boat for Australia and got caught. They put him in jail. It was pretty tough. We wrote and cabled the phosphate company at Auckland; I suppose the French held up the messages. Well, about that time the Japs walked into Indo-China. Nobody cared much then if a dozen Japs had been murdered. The Free French feeling has always been very strong here. I got Odd out of jail."

"That was when he went to Kone?" put in Macartney.

"Yes. We had friends there in the nickel administration. They could not help him to leave New Caledonia. He came back to Noumea, was attacked and nearly killed—and I guess he lost his head about the whole thing. He said he was going back to Wimpole Island and stay there and cover up the deposit. I could not argue him out of it. He got a boat, provisions and so forth, and that's the last I saw of him. The Jap war came right on top of that, in December."

She tossed away her cigarette with an air of finality.

"That's all," she concluded. "I might have told you yesterday, but I was angry. And I wanted to get to the island to find him. I think you're pretty square, so I decided to come clean."

"Thank you," said Macartney with grave courtesy.

"And I know where to find the records and so forth," she added. "That is, if he's not there. He may not be, you know, after these months."

She rose and went forward, settling herself in the bow. Brent looked at Macartney, who grimaced.

"My apologies, old chap. You were right about her," he said quietly. A hail came from one of the men who had gone aloft. The three Frenchmen broke into excited speech. The helmsman swung over the wheel a trifle.

"That's the island—we can't see her from the deck," said Macartney.

"Close, then?"

"Apparently not. She rises several hundred feet out of the water and is visible afar. This is all volcanic sea-bottom; one of the nearest islands is an active volcano."

"So, apparently, is Stella Lundquist," observed Brent. "Pretty well cut up about her brother. Think we'll find him alive?"

The New Zealander shrugged. "Ask me something easy."

The island became a blur against the horizon. Noon came and the wind held; it was from the northeast, and according to the captain this was lucky, for landing on the island was something of a trick in anything but a dead calm, and quite impossible in a westerly wind.

The *Hirondelle* made fast to the buoy, the dinghy was hauled alongside, and Brent got into her, holding off with the boathook. The grinning crew, delighted that they had actually got here, made it plain that they had no intention whatever of landing; not for any money, said the skipper. Provisions were passed down, luggage stowed, Macartney and Stella followed, and with two oars out the boat headed shoreward.

"You couldn't get those Frenchmen on shore at any price, as the captain said," observed Stella. "Some escaping convicts once made this island, I've heard; and only one was



Illustrated
by
Cleveland
Woodward

It was stark tragedy; of the entire lot, four men reached shore alive.

Close up, the island was not impressive, being not quite two miles long. It lifted bluffly out of the water to a height of four hundred feet; the south and higher end was bare and naked, but the northern half was green and wooded. Stella, who had been here once before, pointed as they came in toward the western shore.

"The flagstaff's gone—it used to be right above that landing bight! Over on the eastern side the cliffs drop down to a lovely green terrace; but this is the only landing. It isn't much of a bay and doesn't give any protection in a blow—there it is!"

"If any lighters were there, they're gone now," said Mac. "Not a boat of any kind. Good thing we have the dinghy. If your brother came here, where's his boat?"

The bight had opened out abruptly and close. A mooring-buoy was anchored off a small and unsafe-looking wharf. Godowns or sheds of corrugated iron looked nakedly abandoned. A split in the giant walls formed a cañon that ran down to these sheds and wharf; it was green and inviting, thick with trees and brush, and the regular lines of buildings appeared in it. The bungalow and other structures, said Stella, lay up yonder.

picked up—with some horrible yarn. I could never get anyone to tell me what it was. I suppose cannibalistic. No, there's no boat here of any kind," she added.

"Look out for rotten planks on the wharf," said Brent. "What, no spiders out to greet and welcome us? No nothing, in fact!"

It could not have been better expressed. The place was distinctly uninviting.

CHAPTER THREE



THE tide was high. There was a strip of sandy beach beside the wharf, and they ran the boat up on this, pulling her on into the dry sand. She was safe here against any weather. Then, grouped on the wharf, they shouted. The three Frenchmen on the *Hirondelle* got their idea and also shouted; the skipper produced a shotgun and banged away, laughing heartily.

Echoes rolled from the cliffs and the gorge-like cleft. Sea birds whirled up in huge flocks. The white-hot sun.

the pallid and desolate shore, made no response. Wimpole Island had no voice except the squawking birds.

As the planks seemed firm enough, Macartney started shoreward, Stella at his heels; a well-worn path appeared, leading up the gorge, down which came a tiny tumbling stream of cold water. Huge banana trees, firs, plantains, closed it from sight.



Charley Brent paused and picked up something that had caught his eye, scrutinized it, and followed the others, who were already on the path. The sheds and other structures here occupied a shingly bench of rock that stretched off to the left; everything was windswept, sun-smitten, desolate, with old abandonment. The cool green gorge, that no doubt formed a road to the top of the island table, was a keen contrast.

"As far as I know, the house should be quite livable," Stella was saying, "whether we find Odd here or not. The place was always well stocked with provisions, and both the bungalow and the bunk-house were supposedly kept in shape for immediate occupancy. . . . Hello! The house looks all right, anyhow! Odd! Odd!"

She shouted and broke into a run. The bunk-house, to the right, was a long, low building almost hidden by trees. The bungalow above lay in a bench of the gorge; it was not large but was white-painted, and built on hardwood piles, native fashion, with wide porches and thatched roof.

Stella gained it ahead of them, and the door opened to her hand. She disappeared inside. Mac slowed his pace.

"Let her learn the bad news," he said. "Did you notice that path to the bunk-house?"

"No. What about it?" Brent asked.

"Looked better used than this one."

Stella reappeared. "You'd better come on in. Nobody here."

They joined her and entered. There was a large living-room, with kitchen and two bedrooms beyond; all were comfortably furnished, everything was neat as a pin. The place might have been abandoned yesterday or last year.

"Well, he's not here and hasn't been," said Stella, sinking into a chair.

"Look for tin cans," said Macartney. "That'll tell us quick enough if anyone's been around. Not that it's much use. No boats in the cove."

"No boats and no one," she said, disconsolately. Brent took something from his pocket and set it on the table.

"Says you. Now let *Sherlock* Charley bring his genius to bear. Someone was here no later than yesterday. See what I found on the wharf? An empty American cigarette packet, crumpled up and tossed away. A packet—not a tin, like everyone uses hereabouts. American."

He took up the empty sheath, smoothed it out, and handed it to Mac, who gaped at it in mild astonishment.

"How d'ye know yesterday, Charley?"

"Elementary, *Watson*. It hadn't blown away, for one thing. For another, examine it. The sun hasn't affected it or bleached the colors a mite. What's the answer?"

He savored the sensation he had created. Stella was fingering the paper, Macartney was scowling at it; both of them were obviously excited by his find.

"Yes, evidently an American package—but that's impossible!" exclaimed Stella. "And the intense sunlight would affect the colors in a day's time, as you say. This is fresh. And yet—what's that?"

A drumming patter on the roof, a wild swirl of wind among the trees, drew a sharp cry from Macartney.

"A squall! Get the stuff from the boat, Charley! Stella, you stay under cover."

"I'm not sugar, thanks," she retorted, and was out with them and on the run.

A squall it was, and a good one. They had taken more time than they realized; upon getting clear of the trees, the scene was appalling. The little bight, the shore—everything thirty feet away was blotted out by a downpour of water. The mass of clouds sweeping up the sky had suddenly opened itself, and the flood was borne on the wings of a shrieking whirlwind.

To get the grub and personal effects under cover and then up to the bungalow was no great task, but it left them soaked and breathless. A hurried search of the premises turned up some garments of varied cuts and hues, and thus disarrayed they gathered to discuss the situation.

"We're here for the night anyhow," said Mac. "To make certain your brother's not on the island, Stella, we must go up to the table-top and take a look about. Can't do that till morning; it's already getting dark here in the gorge. I presume this is the ascent?"

"The only way up I know of," assented the girl, her eyes darkly anxious.

"Then there are the records and other things, if you can obtain them for me."

She nodded. "I know where they're hidden; no one else would, except Odd. We can't get them till morning, either. After we take a look above and make sure he's not here, I'll show you where they are. There's oil for the lamps, luckily, so I'll get something started for supper."

"Everything here is remarkably neat," observed Charley Brent, who had been taking mental notes. "Too neat, I'm tempted to say. Like an exceptionally well-cared-for place. Too bad we didn't have a chance to adopt your tin-can suggestion, Mac; it was a good one. But the rain has spoiled clues, I expect. Why so somber, Stella?"

"I've been thinking," she rejoined. "If Odd had been here and gone, he'd have left a message of some sort. But that's not all. Don't count too much on leaving in the morning."

Macartney gave her a quick look. "Oh! You noticed it too, eh? The wind, I mean."

"Yes. From the west. Our Frenchmen will have to put to sea and come back for us later."

As though to emphasize her words, a shriek of wind went whirling up the gulch. She shrugged, rose and got one of the oil lamps alight, Macartney providing the match.

Brent sat in dismayed silence, remembering now that the little bight had no shelter with the wind in the wrong quarter. The devil! This pleasant jaunt might not be what it seemed after all, and he found himself desperately anxious of a sudden to get back to Noumea for the big news, whatever it might be.

"Think I'll run down and take a look," he said. "The rain seems to have let up. If our yacht has lit out, it'll be just too bad. We'd better know before dark."

"Grin and bear it," said Macartney. "Going in those ragged pants?"

"They're better than nothing, and everything else is wet. Be back in a jiffy."

Brent got into his wet shoes, and wearing only the tattered denim trousers that had replaced his own garments, started forth. The trousers were too large, but would serve.

The rain had become a mere drizzle swept on the wings of the howling wind. He hurried down the path and, on breaking clear of the trees, stood in blinking consternation. The sinking sun was down behind massed clouds and squalls were sweeping the sea—and the little bight was empty. The mooring-buoy was there, but the *Hirondelle* had obviously taken to flight to keep from being jammed on the rocky shore.

Well, as Mac had said, grin and bear it. When the Frenchmen would return was dependent upon the wind, naturally; after all, they might be back with morning, but those clouds did not hold any good-weather augury.

"Damn!" he said aloud, clutching his waistband. "Well, it might be worse. Anyhow, we've got chow and shelter—"

"Stick 'em up!" said a voice.

"Eh?" Brent glanced around and saw nothing. "Was that somebody?"

"Stick 'em up, pal, and do it quick," came the echo. The voice was grinding, harsh with suffering. "Quick!"

It came from the mass of trees close at hand.

"You be damned!" exclaimed Brent. "I got to hold up my pants. Say, is that you, Lundquist? We're friends."

"No, it aint Lundquist, it's Jim King." The words came in a savage snarl. "And I'll blow hell right through you if you make a false move. Were those Japs in that boat? Sounded like Jap talk to me."

"No, French," said Brent, bewildered by all this. "You could see they weren't Japs."

"I didn't get here in time. I was laying in the boat and couldn't make it, but now I'm getting around," came the reply.

"I'll be good prisoner," said Anton. "— Hey! Look out!" His words ended in a yell of panic as an automatic roared.

This was too much.

"Say, are you nuts or am I?" demanded Brent. "Boat? There isn't any boat except ours! Come on and show yourself. You may be a parrot for all I know."

A grim chuckle sounded. "You listen okay and you look okay, but I aint taking no chances," said the invisible Jim King. "Are you an American? Who's with you?"

Brent gave his name. "Macartney, a New Zealander, and Miss Lundquist, Minnesota-born," he went on. "We came here to look for her brother, who was manager of the phosphate concession. A French boat brought us from Noumea. We're up at the bungalow now, or they are; come along and satisfy yourself. Where'd you come from?"

"Heaven," said Jim King, with another chuckle. "Boy, you sure listen okay! I'll risk it—you lead the way, and don't walk fast, and don't look back. My gun can act quicker than you can. So there's a house here, huh?"

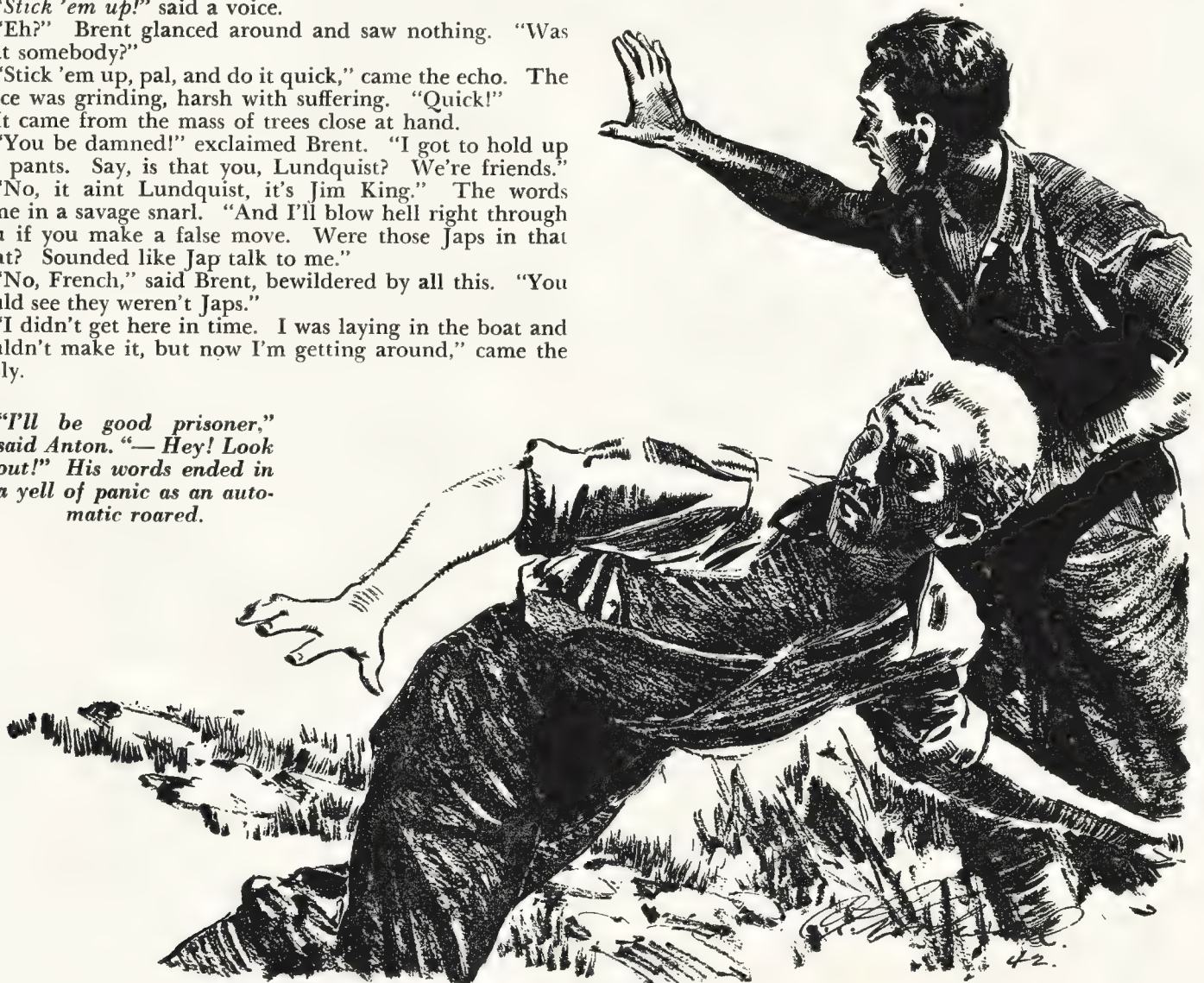
"Good Lord!" exclaimed Brent, exasperated. "You must have known there was, you nitwit! The path goes right to it—"

"Lead on—and stop chewing the rag," came the order.

Brent obeyed, uncertain whether he was dealing with a madman or a fool.

He started up the path, slowed his pace at a profane command, and stole a glance to the rear. Darkness was closing in; he could see only an indistinct figure there. It seemed to be limping.

Macartney had lamps blazing cheerfully and was helping Stella get a supper-table in shape, when Brent shoved



open the door and walked in. Behind him, a second shape filled the doorway; a man dressed in baggy khaki, who leaned on a crutch made of a tree-branch, held a pistol trained on those in the room, and surveyed them with a certain savage astonishment.

"Folks, let me present Jim King," said Brent wearily. "I know nothing about him, except that he seems *non compos mentis*. He talks about having a boat, for example—"

"Oh, yeah?" broke in King, with a grin splitting the haggard lines of his face. "The boat's just inside one of them sheds. It's our rubber raft—"

"Look here, man, you're hurt!" exclaimed Macartney. "Of course I'm hurt," snapped King. "Our ship couldn't quite make the island—we flopped into the water not a quarter-mile from shore. That was early this morning. We were all set with the raft, and paddled in for the wharf. Them two cussed Japs showed up and opened fire on us—can you beat it? That's when I got this bad leg—"

"Japs? Did you say there were Japs here?" exclaimed Stella.

"You'd better believe it, ma'am." King came hobbling inside. His right leg was bandaged. "They must have seen our bomber come down, too. There was just me and Frank Katz and Leo left. Leo's our radio man. Frank Katz, he's the cap'n. That ack-ack hit us for fair—"

Brent suddenly woke up to the fact that this was real.

"For the love of Mikel!" he broke out. "Here we're standing around and prattling like fools, and this man's hurt and about used up! Here, King, put down that gun and stretch out on the divan—give me your arm, that's right! We'll have a drink around, and a bite to eat, and we'll soon be all squared away—"

Under the swift friendliness and help that surrounded him, King lost his animosity. With a deep sigh, he just let himself go, and in no time was lying on the rattan couch at one side of the room.

"Aint that a hell of a note, now?" he murmured complainingly. "For us to go all through a battle and get shot up and pancake on the sea and come ashore—and then to get plugged by two damned dirty little Japs standing on the wharf! Two of us dead when we come down, too; Joe Williams, the gunner, and Dunlap, navigation—"

"Where are your two pals now?" demanded Brent.

"They took off after them Japs. Aint come back—"

"Now stop your talking," cut in Stella Lundquist brusquely. "First thing is your leg. Charley, give me a hand with those bandages. Mac, get some of the warm water from the stove. In this part of the world, Mr. King, a wound is a potential germ-factory."

King regarded her with a wondering but blissful smile as she leaned over him.

"All right," he murmured. "Just call me Jim, ma'am, Bombardier Jim. Ouch!"

CHAPTER FOUR



HAT with pain and exhaustion, King was used up.

Although the bone was uninjured, the fleshy part of his thigh had been badly chewed up by a bullet. The first-aid already given him had averted worse trouble. Now, with the wound washed and dressed afresh by Stella, he was asleep almost before she had finished.

"Let him sleep, poor chap," she said. "We'll wake him up later. Most of our things are dry by now, so I'm going to get into my own clothes and then resume supper."

All three were thunderstruck by this arrival; yet, now that King's story was known in part, it no longer appeared bizarre. Much of the mystery was cleared up, but the residue was ominous in the extreme.

"Well, the cigarette package is now explained," said Mac, as the two men dressed. "And you were wrong; it was this

morning, not yesterday! An American bomber, eh? Badly shot up and two of the crew dead. Sees Wimpole Island, tries to make it, finds it impossible, and plops down close to shore. Pu's out rubber raft, starts ashore—and two Japs appear, firing. I hope the missing crew members have caught those Japs!"

"But the amazing thing—Japs here!" cried Brent. "What were they doing here?"

"And where's Lundquist?"

"And what a difference it would have made if we'd searched those sheds down by the shore, eh? Maybe. Once again, what were those Japs doing here? Shipwrecked?"

Macartney ran a comb through his hair. "Not likely. My child, don't you know that the Japs had everything in these seas staked out long before the war started? And, once they won the first shove, a tremendous tide of loot started back for Japan. These phosphates are valuable. Our two Nips might have been here to direct the looting—Lundquist had a couple of Japs, you know—or they might have been scouting the island; but they were not here by chance."

"You don't think Lundquist sold out to them?"

"No, much as I would like to see you defend him, I don't. Y'know the next move of Hirohito's lads will be to grab New Caledonia. Then they'll hold the Australian coast in a vise and can cut off any help coming from your States. That's why I'm here. My Gov'ment is most frightfully anxious to get all these phosphates possible before the Japs move n."

"You two had better quit primping and come eat," sang out the voice of Stella.

They complied. Their guest was not to be wakened by mere voices and lights; they let him slumber on. Tea and canned willy, biscuit and jam made up the meal, and it was more than sufficient.

"It's good jam," said Brent. "I suppose it's one of the Aussie jams that flood the market in these parts. What's the fruit?"

"Nothing that I know," said Mac. "Did you notice, Stella?"

"No, but I'll get the tin," she rejoined, and came back from the kitchen with it.

Brent took it from her, ran his eye over the label—and swallowed hard. Without comment, he handed it to Macartney, who nodded.

"Oh! Quince and plum—y'know, those Aussies do have the damndest combinations in their jams!"

"Look further," said Brent, and pointed. "Imitation. Mitsi Inro Company, Nagasaki. Who would bring Jap jam here, except a Jap? Two were here, we know. Probably living here; that's why the place was so neat."

He met the startled gray eyes of Stella.

"Here!" she echoed. "But—but that means—if they've been here—"

"I expect so; make up your mind to it," said Brent. "They came—your brother went. How? That's what we want to know. You've seen none of his personal effects about?"

"Only very old things," she replied. "Yes, my mind's been made up a long time. Don't worry about me."

"That explains why there's no insect life to speak of in the house, what?" spoke up Macartney. "Y'know, I'd noticed that!"

Ignoring him, Stella went on speaking.

"I'm afraid it's all very plain. Odd was here. Those two Japs replaced him. They were here this morning. They were armed. Now they've been replaced by those American airmen—"

"Who, thank heaven, are also armed," put in Brent as she paused. "And who will no doubt see our light and come barging in here any time now."

As, in fact, they did some ten minutes later, with delighted greetings and no end of excited explanations, which

wakened King from his slumber. Leo, as the radio man seemed to be named, was another casualty; he had a broken arm, received somewhere on top of the island from a Jap bullet.

"We got one of 'em, the other got away among the trees," said Frank Katz. "We only had our pistols; he had a rifle. Too bad. With that rifle he can make us pretty sick, unless we run him down and finish him."

"Which isn't likely, with pistols," Macartney said dryly.

Katz was a laughing, merry-eyed young fellow from Omaha. He had piloted his fortress from Bataan to Java and now to Australia; and this last flight had been with a task squadron that had caught an enemy force up north and smashed it badly. He was hard hit by the loss of bomber and crew; also, he was at the point of exhaustion, having been hard at it for two days and a night.

"Funny thing," he observed. "I searched the one Jap we knocked off, for papers, and what d'ye think I found on him? No papers, but this. Wasn't his, either; loot, no doubt."

He tossed out on the table a ring. It was a very handsome ring of a fraternal order, set with a large diamond. At sight of it Stella uttered a little cry; she seized it, examined it, and pointed to initials graven on the inner side of the circlet.

"That settles it," she said in a low voice. "Odd wore this, always; it belonged to our father. He would never have parted with it—those Japs—"

Leaving the ring on the table, she rose and went into her bedroom and closed herself in. The astonished Katz broke into questions; for a while the three men talked, clearing up the situation. The two wounded men, having had a bite and a sup, were asleep again.

"Well, I'm all in," said Katz at length. "Keep the ring; give it to her in the morning. I don't want it. One of you chaps had better stand guard. Here, take my gun." He laid the weapon on the table beside the ring. "If your ship isn't back tomorrow, we'll have to go after that remaining Jap, I expect. Talk it over in the morning. The floor looks good to me; never mind a bed—"

His protests were swept aside and Mac took him into the bedroom. King had the divan, Leo the extra bed. Mac came back and looked at Brent.

"We get the floor, I expect," he said. "Toss you for the first watch."

Brent got it. They agreed on three-hour watches, turned the lamp down, and Macartney made himself comfortable on the floor. Brent took the army pistol and a blanket, and settled himself on the wide veranda to stand duty.

IT was a long three hours. As watcher he was of no use; everything was pitch black, and overhead the wind was stirring the trees. The chopping bark of a flying fox came from somewhere; the long roll of the surf shuddered up from the reefs with monotonous insistence, and Charley Brent had plenty of time to commune with himself.

He had no more idea whither he was going than anyone else caught in the grind of this war. See it through—that was all anyone thought about; then, maybe, start fresh somewhere, in a vague way.

"Can't be certain," he reflected, "yet I'm almost sure that it might be nice not to be alone. I'm no flaming genius, so drunk with his own success that he's sufficient unto himself. I'm just a good plod-along workman, the kind that never gets anywhere without help and partnership and something to save up for."

Had nothing to do with Stella, of course. This was about as coldly unromantic an excursion as he had ever experienced, yet she made it memorable. He shook his head with a sigh. What about all the plays and stories and novels where the dashing hero so hypnotized the heroine by his bravura that she just put her arms around his neck and melted there? Hard to imagine Stella doing that with anyone. The thought drew a chuckle of mirth to his lips.

The floor creaked and swayed slightly. He clutched the pistol and threw off the safety. The floor was composed of poles heavily overlaid with matting, and sagged in spots. He discerned a moving object, lifted the gun, then froze in cold horror as Stella's voice reached him.

"Where are you? Answer me! Where are you?"

"Good God! And I nearly shot you! Here, over by the steps."

She found him, put down a pillow, and subsided. "Couldn't sleep," she said softly. "Only needed a breath of fresh air. I can see just one star through the trees!"

"Your own. One for Stella. Lucky woman!"

She made no response. Brent remembered; she knew, now, her brother was dead. This was no time for chatter. He held his peace. That reiterant muttering, that muffled thunder of the surf kept creeping across the silence; one was constantly listening for some message that never came.

THERE was something satisfying in her nearness. Even in silence and darkness, one was aware of her presence. But for occasional movements Brent would have thought her asleep.

"What made you say that?" her voice came suddenly. "Why lucky?"

"Oh! You are lucky, you know. Just in being what you are."

Silence, until she spoke once more.

"It's nice, not having to talk. You're good company. D'you suppose Odd is hanging about here? I mean, if he's been killed—"

She did not finish. Brent made awkward response.

"I don't know, Stella; I'm no expert," he said cautiously. "But I expect the air lanes or whatever you call 'em are pretty full right now. Full of Japs, I hope."

"I've felt that I'd never see him again; but it's tough," she said softly. "Did you ever know somebody who was like a shadow back of your life, back of all you did and hoped for? I don't know how to express it."

"Why, sure! I get you," he exclaimed. "My dad died when I was kid, but I had an uncle who was like that. A wonderful guy! He sort of backed everything up for me—like you say, his shadow was over us all. He was a fighter, you bet!"

"It was that way with my brother," she rejoined. "He was so vital, such a fighter—"

Her voice trailed off into nothing. When his watch ended at eleven, she was asleep; he woke her and they went in together and routed out Macartney. . . .

Brent had the last watch at dawn, alone this time. The wind had gone down, but the shuddering vibration of the surf was unending; daylight was slow to reach into this westward-facing niche of the great rock. When the day did come, there was no incident. A trip down to the bight showed Brent an empty sea, a clear horizon; when the *Hirondelle* would return was hard to say, but at least the weather now favored.

Morning revealed a new aspect of Stella. She assumed charge of the bungalow as though it were her own home, and took over a dozen tasks that kept her brusquely busy. The two wounded men, the simple cooking, the necessary straightening-up—she had no moment for anything else, until they settled down at the breakfast-table.

Frank Katz, after his night's sleep, was also like a new person; the two other men reflected his gleaming vim and vitality. It was not for nothing, Brent thought enviously, that the air force held the finest physical specimens extant. He wished he had their hard resilient quality.

The pilot was all for taking up the hunt of the remaining Jap at once, but to this Brent cautiously demurred.

"I can sympathize with your objective, Cap'n, but not with your plans," he said dryly. "Let sleeping dogs lie, say I shrewdly! What's up on top of the island?"

"The south end's all bare; the phosphate beds, I suppose. Trees and brush from here up to the north end."

"And plenty of cover for a guy with a rifle? No thanks! Could that Jap get down here except by the trail?"

Not likely, unless he flew, said Katz. The cranny in the rock was steep, filled with trees and brush and rocks; the trail followed the water-run to the top.

"Then we'd better save our breath," persisted Brent. "If we keep a guard at the top of the trail, our friend the enemy will be blocked. We'd probably starve him out if we stayed long enough."

"Hold on!" spoke up Macartney. "Stella, what about the records and so forth? Are they here in the house?"

"Oh! I forgot all about them!" she exclaimed. "No, not here; I'll have to take you to the place where they're hidden. It's part way to the top of the trail. Odd told me exactly how to locate it."

"Then suppose we attend to that detail immediately." Mac gave the pilot a cheerful nod. "Do your hunting later, Cap'n. Someone should be posted below at the wharf to signal us if the boat comes back—"

"Aw, forget about the Nip," struck in Jim King. "Won't do us any good to shoot him; we're not staying here forever. Leave him be, Frank."

Leo struck in with a similar plea, and Katz shrugged.

"Okay, then; majority wins," he said resignedly. "I think you're wrong, though. Never leave a Nip alive if you can leave him dead; and this one's a menace. As quick as we can put Japan in ashes, you'll see the greatest hunting-down of Nips all through these islands that ever was—cut 'em off from home, then exterminate 'em like rats!"

"Hate-talk gets you nowhere," put in Brent.

The pilot flashed around.

"You're not in the service; what do you know about it? We've seen things, I tell you!"

"I've seen just as much, maybe more. That's the way our ancestors used to talk about the Injuns; wipe 'em out! So they did it. The world's gone ahead since then. And we have hundreds of thousands of fine citizens of Jap descent, back home. You can't condemn any race because some of its people are barbarians—"

"You won't get far with that kind of talk among Army men," put in the angry pilot.

"You're both wasting time and energy," intervened Stella with decision. "Let the world argue it out later! As a pilot, Captain Katz, you're worth too much money to the United States to risk your life because of a lonely enemy; so be practical. And useful," she added, smiling suddenly. "There's plenty of work to be done right here."

Macartney rose. "If we're going up the trail, I'd feel safer armed. Can Brent and I borrow guns from two of you chaps?"

No sooner said than done. Katz pressed his own weapon on Stella, who refused.

"Thanks, you keep it yourself! We need more drinking water hauled from the brook. And you'd better keep an eye on the bay, just in case the ship comes back. We'll not be gone long. Wash the breakfast dishes, if you want."

There was a laugh all around. The brief flare-up had left no hard feelings.

CHAPTER FIVE



HE trail that ascended from the bungalow toward the island top was a steep one and very rocky, ascending along the left-hand wall of the gorge.

"Don't see how they ever got any phosphate out this way," grunted Macartney. He had gone well ahead of the other two.

"They didn't," replied Stella. "They ran cars on rails from the phosphate beds over to the cliffs, above the little bay, and sent it down there. And don't go too far ahead, Mac! When you come to a giant kauri that rises out of the creek-bed, wait for us."

This being practically the national tree of New Zealand, Mac could not miss it.

The trees and rocks were still wet with that sharp deluge of the previous evening, and the morning sunlight was bringing up the moisture in a thin misty vapor. Brent eyed the tangle in the ravine with satisfaction; not even a Jap could get through that steep maze of fallen rock, dead wood and brush, and wild thorn. Anyone going up or down must stick to the trail or the air.

Macartney was waiting beside an enormous evergreen that towered upward a good sixty feet before it broke into branches. Here the trail hugged the cliffside closely, following a narrow ledge, along which a handrail of driftwood had been run; it was shaky and too precarious for use.

Coming to it, Stella paused, counted the uprights of this rail, covered half its length, and then turned to the cliffside. She put her hand on a boulder of some size that protruded from the rubble; it was one of countless others.

"This must be the one," she said confidently. "The position's right, and it's got a rusty stain across the top just as he said. But it seems buried too hard and fast to move."

"What's it supposed to do?" demanded Brent. "Swing when you press a spring, like the secret door in the movies?"

"Don't be silly," she reproved him. "Pry it loose and there'll be a hiding-place in the rock; everything's there, or should be there. Certainly this stone hasn't been disturbed in a long time."

Brent and Mac took hold. So solid was the stone that it was hard to credit her story, until their united effort loosened and dislodged it a trifle. Then it was only a matter of rocking until it came. A cry of warning from Mac, a little rush of dirt and rubble, and it came tumbling out of its niche and went crashing over the trail into the ravine beyond.

A HOLLOW in the rock, formerly sealed by the stone, now stood revealed; it contained an oblong packet wrapped in tarred canvas. Both men stood back.

"Your show, Stella," said Macartney. "We don't know whose property it is, so far."

She gave him a glance of appreciation and took out the package; nothing else remained in the irregular crack. It was tied about with cord and sealed.

"We can't examine it here," she exclaimed, color lifting in her cheeks. "Shall we go back? I do know that everything in it belongs to the company."

"Suppose you folks take your treasure-trove back," said Brent, holding a match to his pipe. "I want to go top-side, since I'm this far already, and take a look at what's up there. And I'm not hunting any Japs, either," he added, at a look from Stella, "so save your sympathies till they're needed. If I shoot, you'll know there's something wrong; and if any shot comes from below, I'll know it's a signal about the boat. Okay, Mac?"

"Dinkum with me," was the reply. "But keep your eye peeled; your first intimation of mortality present will be a rifle-crack."

Brent laughed. "I'm not going exploring. Just for a look-see at the top."

With a nod, he departed, unhurried. It had occurred to him that, by reaching the table-like crest of the island, he would have a view of the sea stretching afar, and this was a temptation not to be resisted. If the *Hirondelle* were anywhere within long miles, he would know it.

Stella handed the package to Macartney. "Take it; you might as well," she said. "We can open it together. . . . I'm worried about those two wounded men, Mac. Isn't there something we can do for them?"

The New Zealander shook his head. "We set Leo's arm and did a fair job too. The other chap, King, is well bandaged; best leave him alone. No, there's nothing more we can do, except get them back to Noumea. Smoke?"

She accepted a cigarette and they started back together. There was no elation over the finding of the package; so

She put her hand on a boulder that protruded. "This must be the one," she said. "Pry it loose."



evident was the fate of the man who had hidden it that this overhung them both, depressingly. And now the evidence of his fate came bursting upon them.

They had barely reached the great kauri pine when they were stopped by a scramble of feet, and Frank Katz appeared, boyishly eager and alive. He halted abruptly.

"Oh, hello!" he exclaimed. "Look here, I've located something down near the wharf—sorry to break it to you like this, but I guess you'll have to know, anyhow."

He broke off in some confusion, his impetuosity yielding to awkward silence.

"Well?" prompted Stella. She stiffened a little, as though sensing what was coming and preparing to meet it. "Go on. What have you found?"

"The tide's out, you know," replied the young pilot. "There's a wreck showing itself up north of the wharf; looks like a big sea-going launch of some sort. The stern's out of water, anyhow, and it has Jap markings. That's how those two Nips came ashore, see? And that's not all."

He paused, embarrassed now by the cold gravity of the girl's look, then plunged ahead.

"Well, it's a grave, up beyond those sheds. I'm real sorry about this news, Miss Lundquist; I guess it's the one, all right. It's got a cross made of stones on top of it and it looks rather fresh. . . . I mean— Well, I guess that's all—"

He caught a sharp, angry gesture from Macartney and backed away, then departed in renewed confusion.

"He belongs five thousand feet closer to heaven," commented the New Zealander acidly.

Stella made no response. She stood as though frozen; but her gray eyes were alive, and after a moment her shoulders drooped, and she made a gesture of dismissal.

"Go on, Mac; you go back," she said. "I can't; not yet. I'm going on up and get out of this horrible gorge—I hate it, hate it! I want to get up to the clean air and sky."

Mac regarded her with compassion. "Did it hit so hard?" he inquired gently. She nodded and bit her lip.

"I tried—said I'd known it all the time—and I lied. I still hoped. He's dead, dead! Even with the ring—I thought he might turn up. . . . Go on back, will you?"

"But you can't be wandering around alone—"

"Brent's up there. It's safe. I want to be alone, I tell you! Here, give me that pistol if it'll make you feel any better about it—and leave me alone, do you hear?"

Her tension had broken; she was, obviously, close to hysterics. Macartney, with a normal horror of emotionalism, made haste to yield, gave her the pistol from his pocket, and made no protest as she turned and threw herself at the narrow mounting path. With a shake of the head, he turned back from the bungalow, clutching his precious package.

BRENT, meanwhile, made his way up the trail at leisurely pace, keeping a wary lookout ahead. He had anticipations of coming smack out upon the island table-top as though from a flight of stairs; he should have known better. Presently the gradient leveled off, and from the lower gorge he advanced into a widening glade. The spring of water bubbled from a rocky little scarp at the left. On ahead to the rocky scarp lay a brush-studded open space; trees began again, and mounted thickly over the sky-rim.

He halted, hand on weapon. Nothing moved, nothing human was in sight. Evidently he had not yet gained the island's ultimate top. For a look at the ocean below, his

best plan would obviously be to mount the little rocky scarp at the left. Finding no cause for alarm, he started toward it, then paused to kneel and drink from the trickle of water.

He lifted his head and rose, startled. From the trees ahead, a man was coming openly toward him, waving something white, pausing to shout something at him.

Brent knew that this was the Japanese survivor, of course. A talk, a truce; the man carried no rifle. Treachery? Very likely; but this fellow was alone here, and Brent scouted the thought that he could not cope with a single opponent. He drew out his handkerchief and waved it. The other at once broke into a trot, and Brent advanced to meet him, pistol handy.

And now, to his astonishment, he perceived that this man was not a Jap at all.

He stared, incredulous. The man wore high laced boots, drab trousers and blouse, and was bare-headed. He had cropped red-brown hair, white skin, regular features and a slight reddish mustache.

"Hello!" called Brent. "Thought you were a Jap!"

The other waved his hand and grinned widely. "No Jap," he replied. "Russ—White Russ. I am Nikolai Anton, Siberian. A chemist. A technical expert. I was three year in Seattle. You American?"

Amazed but wary, Brent made response. Anton spoke labored but fair English and was a cheerful soul. Provided with a cigarette, he gushed into a veritable torrent of words, fast as he could reel them off. In his haste he spattered out French, Russian, Japanese and English alike, but made himself understood. He was unarmed, had left his rifle among the trees, was for peace at any price and wanted to surrender himself at once, being hungry. The only remaining Jap had been shot that morning by the bomber crew, and Anton wanted none of it. That Jap had been an officer.

"Sure I fight while he lived," said Anton. "He was my superior, an important man. But he was the one who shot at the men in the water; he got what was coming, sure!"

Upon the marveling Brent now burst the full story of what had taken place. Anton was one of the uncounted White Russian refugees who had found haven in Japan, giving their services in return. His services had taken him all over the world, and in this last instance he had come to Wimpole Island with a party of occupation.

The larger portion of this party, consisting of a minor transport bringing soldiers, workmen and matériel for defenses of all kinds, had gone astray; the smaller portion, a converted yacht bringing the officers and technicians, had survived the typhoon that blew her consort somewhere else, but in making the island found Odd Lundquist waiting. And before they realized it, Lundquist had calmly thrown a home-made dynamite bomb aboard them.

For the visitors, it was stark tragedy. A heavy surf put their disabled craft on the rocks and Lundquist was still waiting with a rifle. Out of the entire lot, four men reached shore alive, and Lundquist killed two of these before he was shot.

"He not die for two days," said Anton. "We treat him good. I make grave. Our big ship has not come but maybe she come now. *Nichevo!* I'll be good prisoner— Hey! Look out!"

His words ended in a yell of panic as a bullet whined past his face; the heavy explosion of an automatic roared. Anton burst into a zigzag run, leaping like a deer. Stella, who had appeared unperceived, stood fifty yards away firing rapidly but deliberately.

With a wild yell of protest, Brent went for her on the jump. She ignored him, until her weapon clicked empty. Anton had fallen, but picked himself up and disappeared among the trees, while Brent stormed at the girl in helpless dismay.

"He had surrendered! He wasn't a Jap at all but a Russian!" he shouted at her. She made no resistance as he

tore the empty pistol from her hand. She stood wide-eyed, breathing rapidly; then, in an uncontrolled sweep of emotion, she burst into a storm of sobs.

"His grave!" she cried. "They found—his grave! He's dead—"

"And this fellow you've been shooting at took care of him and buried him!" Brent flung at her. "This damfool play of yours has spoiled—"

A bullet screamed past. Frantically, Brent shouted, waved his arms, tried to undo what had been done; no use. Another rifle-shot sent whining death so close that in panic Brent caught hold of her and forced her into a run for cover.

Bullets pursued them; but, somehow, he got Stella safely into the brush at the head of the trail and forced her to take cover. She was gasping, tear-streaked, disheveled, but with action all her hysteria had passed. She listened in dumb wretchedness as Brent talked.

"I had him safe; now you've winged him and he thinks it was a trap—he's desperate!" A bullet zinged overhead and he ducked, then dragged her farther back into cover. By degrees she became calm and comprehended the story that he poured at her.

He made one final effort, tying his handkerchief to a stick and venturing from cover to wave it; the answer was a bullet that seared his arm. Cursing, he gave up and rejoined Stella. She regarded him gravely, mournfully, desperately.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I did not know; everything was in a blaze in my head. Odd is dead, and I wanted only to kill those who had murdered him. I could think of nothing else. Oh, I was mad, insane! Let me get away from here—"

"Steady, now," said Brent quietly. "You've let yourself go; it's make or break, Stella. Hang on, now. Keep your head; can't afford to go off the deep end, old girl. You've done no more than anyone would want to do under the circumstances, and after all you haven't done anything, really. So forget it." He took her hand. "Here, my dear; you were meant to be kind and generous. The future means so much! Remember this above everything—the future!"

Her eyes filled with tears; a tremulous, shy smile touched her lips.

"How strange you make it all seem now!" she began, then started violently. Voices were hammering at them; Macartney was plunging up the path, Frank Katz at his heels.

"What's up? What's the shooting about?" panted the pilot.

"All over," said Brent, with a quiet gesture. They halted, staring, but Stella only looked at them with her same tremulous smile.

"I'm afraid I made a fool of myself," she said, and then went on past them, down the trail.

Brent followed, with the other two men. Nothing else to do, he decided; Anton would not trust any of them now.

CHAPTER SIX



T the bungalow once more, Macartney sat at the living-room table and scattered over the board sheaves of crisp new banknotes, Japanese, French, and Dutch Indies.

"A fortune, and not worth a dime today!" said Brent, awed by the sight.

"Not a farthing," agreed Mac cheerfully. "Our friend Lundquist played a queer double game; betrayed his company for its own good. He was in the grip of those Japs working for him, really secret agents. He got 'em in the end and they got him."

"Why didn't he write, wire, cable, do something about it?" Brent demanded.

"You forget, old chap. In New Caledonia the cards were stacked against him. He was in a forgotten corner of the world, cleverly hemmed in by bribed officials, by Jap agents, by every sort of rascals; a man in a wire rat-trap, no less!"

Brent pointed to the money. "But this—"

"Being helpless, he grabbed everything that was offered him, and laid it by for the benefit of his company, as he thought. Everything was left in his hands as manager, and the rascals pinched him properly, though they paid liberally enough. He could not get a letter or wire to the outside world; so he played the game this way. Now, as it happens, he has left as a legacy the secret of his discovery: A whopping potash bed, up above. Everything's here in these papers, together with his records."

"The poor devil! What a desperate, futile fight he put up!" said Brent in comprehension. "And all the time he was considered as a rascal, fighting a murder charge—"

"And as a result, we now have everything. Unless the Japs step in and grab New Caledonia."

The two were alone, except for the interested and wondering Jim King, stretched out on the divan. The noon meal was over. Leo, quite able to wield a gun in his good hand, had gone up the trail to keep an eye out against a visit from the Russian. Stella had gone down to the bight, Frank Katz accompanying her to reveal the location of his discoveries.

"That money might be good some day," exclaimed Jim King; but Macartney shrugged.

"Not any more, soldier! Waste paper. Here, have some Japanese yen as a souvenir!"

He handed some of the currency to the wounded man, who examined it and tucked it away with a laugh. Then he gathered up the money and papers and began forming all into a compact bundle once more.

"You know, we haven't seen any of those spiders there was so much talk about," said Brent. The New Zealander grunted.

"And that's fair dinkum if you ask me. But we ought to do something about that Russian fellow. Too bad Stella lost her head; can't blame her, of course. . . ."

Brent sucked his pipestem thoughtfully. No, one could not blame her. Thousands of broken people in this part of the world would have done the same thing. He began to understand how much that brother had meant to her.

What an indomitable sort of man he must have been! Hedged in by all the diabolically crafty agencies of spies and secret agents, alone and helpless and desperate, he had waged a single-handed battle to the end. He must have known and accepted the inevitable price; yet he had dodged and fought on, striking at the last a terrific blow that had come within an ace of winning.

"I'll bet you guys a dollar, cash money," spoke up Jim King suddenly, "that Leo brings in the Russian safe and sound!"

They looked at the bombardier, who was grinning cheerfully.

"Yeah?" said Brent, with a sniff. "What makes you so sure of it?"

"Inside information. Leo had a notion he could work it—"

"He'll get his fool head shot off, then," snapped Macartney. "Charley, we'll have to stop any such—"

He broke off abruptly, mouth open, eyes fastened on Brent in sudden sharp alarm. Brent leaped to his feet, jumped to the door and flung it open. The voice of Stella was crying at them; she was climbing the trail at a run, and at sight of them halted, panting.

"Come down! Come quick!" she gasped. "Hurry! Our boat's coming, and another one—Captain Katz thinks it's the missing Jap ship—hurry!"

Jim King caught up his discarded crutch and came hobbling to the door, but the others paused for nothing. Macartney, package under arm, was already on the run. Brent

joined Stella and started down the trail with her. From seaward came the booming crunch of a gun, as though to spur them on.

Words were lost in the mad rush to get within sight of the sea. The fig and banana trees loomed ahead; they were breaking through, coming out into the open above the wharf and the curve of rocky beach, where the excited Frank Katz was awaiting them. And then they saw.

A small steamer, a trawler converted to naval use, was putting out from the south tip of the island; she must have been coming up from the south when she sighted the *Hiron-delle* coming from the north, the high rock hiding her from sight. That gun had given its message and the canvas of the little craft had just been lowered. She lay half a mile off the island.

"They won't hurt her! She's French," exclaimed Brent. "They're not at war with France. Anyhow, we don't know that they're Japs."

"Guess again! Look at her flag going up—see it?" cried Frank Katz. A spot of color showed from the steamer as she headed out for her prey. "Is that your Noumea boat, Brent?"

"Sure is. And our return trip has gone to glory now."

"Not to mention us," added Jim King gloomily. The wounded bombardier, against his own protest, was aided to stretch out on the ground, his shoulders against a rock.

IN silence they watched as the Jap ship, bristling with guns, headed out. Once she landed, their goose was cooked; no hope, no use in showing any resistance or trying to get away. Brent drew a long breath. Tough luck, sure enough! Toughest luck of all for him, the unknown companion lying up by those sheds, who had fought so good a fight. Macartney would lose everything that had been won—

A short, sharp yelp broke from Frank Katz. He began to leap up and down like a madman.

"King! Look! Look!" he burst forth. "It can't be! It can't be!"

"Wow!" From the bombardier came an explosive yell. He scrambled, cursed, came to his one good leg, and stood staring up. "Look at her! A Grumman, Frank! That means she's from a carrier—"

"I say, are you chaps crazy?" demanded Macartney. Brent seized his arm.

"The Jap—quick! Look there!"

It was all in a mad, furious instant. The converted trawler suddenly changed her course, swinging frantically about. From her decks, fore and aft, came a vicious, furious splatter of gunfire—spurts of vapor shooting up from her ack-ack guns. That burst of firing must have sealed her fate, revealing her for what she was.

They were all looking up now; they heard it, they saw it—that great bird winging down from aloft in a straight, deadly, screaming dive, the struts whirring their strident whistle that pierces even above the engine-thrum. Brent stared, transfixed, frozen, his pulses hammering, his heart in his throat—a Grumman on reconnaissance, she was after the Jap, and no mistake about it! Repeatedly, the trawler made sharp-angled changes of course, her guns spouting, shell-bursts starring the sky above her. The plane came swooping relentlessly down; a geyser of water leaped, then another. Out of the dive, the plane went winging up like a homesick angel, swerved and swooped again. Then once more she was heading for the zenith, but this time she had made no misses.

For an instant Brent thought nothing had happened. A little mushroom of smoke blossomed out above the trawler; amidships, one tremendous gush of black vapor burst up and hid her from view, rolling across the water.

"Bull's-eye!" yelled the frenzied pilot, jubilantly hugging Jim King.

The black smoke thinned out. A cloud of steam shot up through it and dissipated. The air cleared, the sea

cleared—and nothing remained. Charley Brent caught his breath as he realized the truth. . . .

Nothing, except tiny black dots that disappeared as one gazed; and the Grumman, having made its kill, circled the scene, flew over the *Hirondelle* with a dip of her wings to the French flag, and then zoomed off again to the westward.

Stella Lundquist stood with her fists clenched, her eyes closed, her lips moving slightly. The *Hirondelle* went winging down the wind to that scene of death; but before she got there, the last of the black specks had vanished. She headed about, tacking to make the island bight.

Behind the silent, awe-struck group, broke forth eager voices. Brent glanced around. From cover of the trees came Leo, and with him was a second figure—that of the blouse-clad Russian, Anton.

"What'd I tell you? Leo said he'd fetch him, and he done it!" Jim King cried in hoarse delight.

"But how?" demanded Brent, remembering. "What made you so sure he would?"

"Why," chuckled King, "Leo's a Russky himself, or his folks are, and he talks the lingo! That's why—"

Frank Katz whirled upon the group, his face alight.

"West! She headed west!" he cried. "Know what that means? A carrier? Some of the fleet must be at Noumea!"

Not merely some of the fleet, but an entire task force of occupation. So it had come; Charley Brent knew now that he had missed the great moment, missed his big news, missed all he had looked forward to.

"Shucks! It doesn't matter a damn," he said, although no one knew what he was talking about. He reached out and took Stella's hand. "Here, relax! You remember what I said to you last night? The big thing, the only thing that matters, is the future. Remember?"

Her eyes opened. She looked at him, and smiled, and her fingers tightened upon his.

A NEW TYPE OF CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
Albert H. Morehead

Here we have a crossword puzzle that offers a challenge to the imagination rather than a strain on the vocabulary. That is

to say, the difficulty is not in the words themselves, but in the definitions. The main types used are the anagram; the enig-

ma, the hidden word and—for variety and to keep you guessing—some straight dictionary definitions. (Solution on page 113.)

ACROSS

- 1 Dr. — Manchú, observe, is a match for the wind
- 6 Quarrels among the rank and file
- 10 Starts Mediterranean base to brew
- 14 Entries in confused strike
- 15 Credit that passage to mine
- 16 The melody is dry, except at the end
- 17 "She ran the — of emotions from A to B." Parker
- 18 From the warnings you should produce arms
- 20 Tangled leash caused the stone to split
- 21 See Tess preen to produce false appearances
- 22 Hidden in many Poe MSS
- 24 Port de Salut, Bleu, Bel Paese
- 25 I bury an article and then can become humane
- 27 To accomplish, I've come out in pain
- 29 Loving tones
- 30 All this agitation turns back the last of the culprits
- 32 Slip away, only at the end go legally
- 37 The dowager countess' son
- 38 Here, they say, it is 1000° F. in the shade
- 40 As he mocks, so shall he reap
- 41 She begins (says E. M. Hull) to love the chieftain
- 43 Went variously to the small amphibian
- 44 The boom strikes back
- 45 Bores at some risk
- 47 Mixtures of alcohol and acid are worth $\frac{3}{4}$ sesterce
- 49 Dull French river flows through Nebraska
- 53 In dismay we saw him come from behind to lap father

- 54 Controls in irons again
- 57 The maps are concealed at last
- 60 For swindlers seek simp or sot
- 61 Laughing at the crazy train
- 62 You could bisect this shed without affecting it
- 63 Weird-sounding lake city
- 64 Little boy
- 65 A person's most prominent feature is mixed
- 66 Tend to change to depression
- 67 Make bookkeeper's note of revised interest on French bonds

DOWN

- 1 Fruit (from thistles?)
- 2 Young State, in a sense
- 3 Hear poems rearranged for code reading
- 4 In a competitive way
- 5 Respect the sibilant before you can be productive
- 6 If you take prams, you walk to avoid stairs
- 7 Get a whiff through the door
- 8 Austrian capital turns to drink
- 9 Sharp pain in the loop
- 10 A mine was involved in creating a State of war
- 11 An American beauty sprang up
- 12 The wrinkles indicate he is backward, almost senile
- 13 Change seats to finish your coffee
- 19 Once bombed with ease our territory can now laugh
- 23 The hems got tangled and interlaced
- 25 Shoot the —s, Herbert
- 26 Grandfather of the Semites, Hamites, Japhetics



- 27 The officers' paid escorts are hidden
- 28 The ship's sailors are first in a wreck
- 31 Light, 13½ tons; medium, 28 tons; heavy, 50+ tons
- 33 Purification of sins laid to vanitas
- 34 Who is to plant plea
- 35 It's expensive to take a dare
- 36 Hearing organs with spelling blunders
- 39 Favorites come back from a short distance
- 42 One takes flyers when he overdraws his account
- 46 Troops had a breathing spell in the desert
- 48 Passer out of scattered elements
- 49 I romp in first
- 50 Metal mixed of nickel and copper holds fruit
- 51 Crab, russet, May, love, of my eye
- 52 Races start back with a center instead of nothing
- 53 13 Down could be an advantage
- 55 Got up, confused and hurt
- 56 Place for Mavourneen to return to
- 58 Mrs. Morley, daughter of James
- 59 Polish river, Russian front in World War I

"WOMEN aren't meant for this kind of life. It's too dangerous," the logging-camp cook told me when I first went to work as flunky in the Cascade logging-camp kitchen.

He was wrong, or else I am not an ordinary woman. To me, camp life was fascinating. I liked to watch the steam donkeys pull in and load the logs—loved to hear the shrill notes of the whistle-punk's signals. The high climbers were my heroes.

A logger lives in fascinating dangers. I was disgusted with my sissy job as flunky, and I longed to be a choker-setter or a high-lead man. But I was doomed for the kitchen with no adventures whatsoever—until a hot day in late summer.

You have perhaps heard of the great Tillamook fire of several seasons ago. I was in it—right in the middle of it. It was an unusually hot day. The camp was working "hoot-owl," but the humidity went so low that the rangers ordered the loggers down for the day. A high east wind, the logger's curse in our part of the country, was racing through the treetops and flapping the loose tar-paper on the cook-house roof.

The camp sat on a high ridge. You could see for miles over coniferous forests, now dry and bleached by the hot summer sun. . . . Dinner was over, and I went outside to pour out some potato peelings. I looked out over the simmering landscape, and several miles to the east I saw a wisp of smoke. As I gazed, speechless, I saw it puff up like a giant Indian smoke-signal. I dropped my pan of peelings and ran for the office.

"A fire!" I yelled to Harry, the bookkeeper. "Looks as if it's in Section 36."

He grabbed the telephone and called the ranger station.

"Send over two hundred men," I heard the ranger say loudly. "It's racing on the wind. A crown fire already."

The men were sent racing down the mountain, armed with axes, shovels and other equipment. In a few minutes there was only one person left in camp. I was that person. I wanted to go, but—I was only a woman.

"The fire will be stopped before it ever gets here," Harry told me before he left. "You'll be safe enough. But if it should come, by the barest chance, lie down in one of Whisky Creek's deepest holes. Be sure there are no big trees above you. You won't have to do it, though. We'll stop it." That's what he thought. He must have been new at the game.

The smoke was billowing up now in great brown clouds that covered the sky and darkened the sun. Ashes were falling as thick as snowflakes, and burning leaves floated down.

Lair of Refuge

Trapped by a forest fire, an Oregon woman follows a mother bear to her den in a cave.

by **ELSIE
McDONALD**

Little as I knew of the ways of a forest fire, in a few minutes I could tell I had to move out. It was coming my way, jumping from snag to snag, from treetop to treetop—a crown fire, as the ranger called it, racing ahead of the main fire, setting new ones as it went.

I got my purse, the money from the office, and snatched two cans of beans from the cupboard. Then I raced for the creek a half-mile away. Before I covered half the distance, the bunkhouses and camp were ablaze.

Rabbits, deer, birds and every other kind of wild life were running with me. I stepped on half a dozen wild-eyed snakes, which ordinarily would have sent me into a panic. While climbing over a log, I lost one can of beans but had no time to retrieve it. The fire was within three hundred yards and reaching for me with hot scorching fingers before I reached the creek.

The stream was shallow and the water hot. Fish floated with white bellies upward. There was no deep hole in sight, so I stumbled on down the creek. The fire was so close it singed my hair and eyebrows. I stopped a second to splash my apron in the water and covered my head. I lost my purse, and went on without it.

The fire roared closer. My clothes caught. The apron dried out. I splashed on more water. Still there was no deep hole. I realized that if I lay down in the shallow water, I'd be boiled alive.

I was about to give up when I saw an old bear with two cubs a few feet ahead. The bear seemed to know

right where she was going, and I stumbled after her. My nose and throat were parched and full of ashes. My hair was burned half off, and my arms and face were scorched painfully.

The bear suddenly disappeared. I took a few steps and followed her. I found myself in a dark, dank cave. The air was stale but free of smoke, and I breathed deeply. The old bear growled in the back of the cave. I stayed near the front as long as I could, but the fire drove me farther back. I could hear it roaring overhead. Several trees fell and jolted the cave, making the dirt trickle down from the roof.

When I could see, I noticed several snakes on the cave floor. I ignored them at first, but when I felt better, I drove them back in the cave with a stick. The bear kept growling at short intervals, and the cubs were restless. . . .

It was three days before I dared leave that cave—three days before the burnt-over forests were cooled enough to walk through.

The first day and night I spent daubing soothing mud on my burns. Smoke was thick in the cave the first day, but I kept my apron wet in the water pools that ran by the cave and kept my head covered.

By the second day some of the pain and smoke had left, and I was dreadfully hungry. I had one can of beans but no way to open it. After throwing the can against a rocky wall and trying other ways without success, I put the can on the ground and stood on it. That broke it open. I ate the mashed beans à la dirt from the floor.

On the third morning the snakes and bear sneaked out of the cave. I gladly stood back to let them pass.

ON the fourth morning I ventured forth, and found blackened forests pitted with dangerous fire-holes. I picked my way over smoking ruins until in late evening I finally reached a camp set up by the fire-fighters.

They thought I was a ghost, and could not believe I had lived through the inferno. When I produced the company's money, I had my moment of glory.

Many were the stories they had to tell. One man lived by burying himself and leaving just his nose sticking out. It was burned, but he came out alive. Another escaped by backfiring. Some lay down in deep-water holes, with burning snags falling about them.

We are now all at work salvaging what was left by the fire demon—salvaging it to make ships and fighting equipment that will mean victory for the Allies.

My hair has long since grown back in, and I've been promoted to a job in the office, but I'll never forget that fire and that bear.

BLUE BOOK is glad to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of \$50. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

HERE this distinguished French writer (now a California University professor) carries on his story from the Battle of Loos; his choice of a pen-name for his first book in English, because it was about British officers with whom he was serving as Liaison officer; his first inspiring visit to America.

FOR the great day Ridel had put me at the disposal of the Division Commander, General Thesiger.

Several days before the attack, Divisional Headquarters was moved from Bethune and installed in a small chateau on the road to Loos. The spectacle of the troops on their way to take up combat posts with heads bent before the passage of shells like wheat bowed down by the wind, the fresh shell-holes smelling of earth and powder, awakened in me a keen longing that I had not felt for a long time—the desire to write. The contrast between the calm of the khaki-clad soldiers, who stood at the crossroads directing the movement of traffic with the calm gestures of policemen in Piccadilly Circus, and the danger of their position seemed to me beautiful and worthy of being recorded; sadder, but not less beautiful, was the contrast later on between the appearance of the General on the morning of battle, very courteous and dignified, in a uniform resplendent with red and gold, and the return that same evening of his corpse, stained with blood and mire. . . .

My rôle during the battle was exactly that which I later assigned to the interpreter Aurelle in my first book. It was my duty to maintain liaison with the French batteries which supported the Division. My route through the damp woods where lost soldiers wandered seemed to me fantastic and romantic. I fancied I was Fabrice on the battlefield of Waterloo. I thought of nothing in the world except the proper execution of my tiny rôle. Unfortunately this offensive of Loos was a complete failure. The wind changed and blew the gas that had been destined for the enemy back on our own troops. The losses in the Ninth Division were so great that after the failure of the offensive it was decided to send us back for a rest. Then it became necessary to reinforce the region of Ypres and G. H. Q. sent us there. It was a hard sector for tired troops.

All this Flemish country appeared strangely inhuman at that time. A house that was not disfigured by any scars was something to look at. The little village of Poperinghe had been cut in two, one half being in ruins while in the other prosperous shops survived where Tommys and Jocks purchased lace from young Flemish

girls who were undismayed by the danger. Ypres was nothing more than a location and a name; Vlamertinghe, Dickebusch, Reninghels, where our Division was encamped, contained only the phantoms of houses in which we found shelter for our sleeping-bags. When I arrived in this sector I stayed with Captain Ridel in the Hoogegraef Convent which was inhabited by six aged nuns and their Mother Superior. These kind sisters had generously allowed us two beds in a room situated at the end of their own dormitory, on condition that we should come in after nightfall and wait before going out until they were at matins—stipulations which were of course scrupulously respected. Later I shared the tent of an English doctor in a field. . . .

It rained. Oh, how it rained! The rich earth became a morass which was rendered treacherous by the beet roots over which we constantly stumbled. Since I had no rubber boots my feet were wet all the time. Sometimes rain squalls would upset our badly secured tent during the night, and we would have to crawl about in the mud under the wet canvas in order to get out. The British Army had given me a very nice horse, and, remembering the lessons of Charpentier, I attempted to school him. One day in jumping a ditch he slipped in the clay soil and fell on me. I can still see that great horse crashing down on my chest and beyond it a livid sky across which black clouds raced. This accident sent me to the Field Ambulance where I met doctors and padres whose conversation delighted me. It was while listening to them that I conceived for the first time the idea of writing dialogues that would describe the English and Scotch from within, with no comments by the author; and it was then that I composed a first chapter, "The Horse and Faun," from an anecdote told by Dr. James, a brilliant and sarcastic alienist with whom I had made friends.

Occasionally some officer would take me with him to Ypres. With an elderly Colonel in the Medical Corps



I went to see my friend, Dr. James, in Maple Copse, a little wood in the front line. At the entrance to the town a violent bombardment stopped us in the midst of a military transport which was blocking the road. The shells came closer. Around us red explosions blew bits of machines, men and horses into the air. For the first time I knew the feeling of fear that twists your entrails and contorts your face. The Colonel, seeing me grow pale, offered his flask:

"Drink," he said. "Dr. Johnson said that brandy is the stuff from which heroes are made."

He was right. A few swallows of good cognac brought back my natural optimism and the bombardment became a spectacle. I have remembered this recipe and made use of it successfully through two wars.

DESPITE the way the days dragged, the weeks and months passed fast enough. General Furse had replaced General Thesiger who had been killed at Loos. Furse was what the men called a *strafer*. As soon as he arrived in a quiet sector he would order bombardments and attacks and provoke the enemy to reply. Ridel had left us, summoned back to the artillery. With Georges Richet, who had replaced him, I translated a very good English book on the war, "The First Hundred Thousand" by Ian Hay who, under the name of Major Beith, was one of our officers. Nelson accepted our translation and published it. Another of our officers was Winston Churchill, a lieutenant-colonel in command of one of our battalions, but I barely saw him at the time. When we left the Ypres sector we were sent to recuperate at Outersteene in the rear of Bailleul. There happily I found a true French village living and working as in time of peace. And I formed a real friendship with the beautiful and sensible daughters of the local tavern-keeper.

During this period of recuperation I became better acquainted with my Scotsmen. I had a chance to visit all the regiments, with their diverse tar-

Difficult Life

MAUROIS

tans: The Gordon Highlanders, the Seaforth Highlanders, Argyll, Black Watch, Camerons. Everywhere I picked up types and anecdotes which were to prove useful for the book I was dreaming about. I saw boxing matches in barns and football matches on muddy fields which were inaugurated by the solemn ritual of the bagpipes and drums. When Christmas came, I was requested to supply the division with turkeys and with sage for the stuffing; on St. Andrew's Day I saw the bagpipes precede the *haggis* into the officers' mess. Thus little by little was filled in the background against which I was to draw my characters. I began to see those characters, as well, in obscure confusion, and I let their transparent shades draw nourishment from flesh and blood and from the conversation of my friends.

I was in no hurry; I knew that one day, when the time had come, the ripe fruit would fall from the branch.

After the Bailleul sector, General Headquarters sent us to the Armentières sector. It was less rough than Ypres but, overworked and stunned by fatigue and nervous shocks, I fell ill. The English doctors decided to evacuate me in the direction of Le Havre. On the card, which I was not supposed to see, I read: "*Aneurism of the aorta.*" Did I really have so serious a disorder? I could not believe it. I felt exhausted but not dying. In the hospital train that took me away, beautiful, rosy, blonde English nurses treated me like a fragile object. I let them do as they liked. Life had been so hard for ten months that a little feminine tenderness was sweet. And then I was going to see Janine again. . . . To the devil with doctors and their diagnoses! My heart leaped, but with joy.

FROM the British hospital train I was taken to the French military hospital at Le Havre, where by good luck I found Doctor Leduc of Pont-dè-L'Arche, who was a friend of my family. He examined me and auscultated me with care.

"I solemnly assure you," he said, "that you have no aneurism of the aorta. What you have is an extra-cardiac murmur and incredibly violent palpitations. I am going to put you on the inactive list."

I begged him not to do it; I had finally been recommended for the rank of second lieutenant and I had set my heart on becoming an officer; this would not be possible if I stayed behind the lines.

"All right," he said, "I shall put you under observation for three months, during which time you will live here at the Base. Then I shall examine you again myself and if it isn't too unreasonable I shall send you back into active service."

The French Mission with the British Army, when it was informed of this decision, attached me to the staff of General Asser, Commandant of the British Base at Le Havre.

General Asser, a superb giant of a man, who had been Commander-in-Chief in Sudan, and whose eyes, beneath bristling eyebrows, remained half closed from the Egyptian sun, was as Kipling said, "a presence." A born commander, energetic and even harsh when necessary, he nevertheless listened to complaints, knew how to soothe wounded pride, and had formed a staff that was devoted to him to the point of abnegation. His second in command, Brigadier General Welch, a little, dark, austere man with a hard face, served him like a faithful dog. British soldiers called them the White General and the Black General; in reality, General Welch was as "white" as his master and a perfect soldier, but he had assumed an implacable mask because his rapid promotion had given him as subordinates men older than himself. Fear secured respect; justice maintained it.

Before my arrival, the liaison work had been carried on by Lieutenant Raymond Woog, a talented painter and charming companion, and by Sergeant de Chabaud-Latour, a courteous and meticulous elderly gentleman who served as the General's authority on etiquette. Having some free time

ahead, I rented a pretty old house at the foot of the hill of Sainte-Adresse and had my wife and daughter join me. It was against the regulations, since Le Havre was in the Army Zone, but all my superiors had become my friends and closed their eyes to it.

But in time of war nothing lasts. Since the British armies were complaining of the poor organization of transport and supplies, General Asser, who had succeeded so splendidly at Le Havre, was suddenly made G.O. C.L. of C. (General Officer Commanding the Lines of Communication) with the rank of Army Commander and the grade of Lieutenant General and with residence at Abbeville. Lieutenant General Sir John Asser (he had received a K. C. M. G. from the King) took Welch, who had become a Major General, with him and requested the Mission to make me an officer and attach me to his staff.

Dr. Leduc hesitated to let anyone with palpitations of the heart go into a city that was said to be heavily bombarded. Finally a medical commission, after prolonged auscultation, reluctantly acceded to my request and sent me back to active duty. I often asked myself, when the time of trouble came, if I acted wisely at that moment. In part my desire to go back was actuated by unassailable motives—the desire to serve and a reluctance to remain in safety. But in part, there was also the childish ambition to obtain the narrow gold stripe. To this ambition and to my scruples I sacrificed the opportunity to watch over my wife and daughter, who . . . had great need of me. I thrust Janine back again into the dangerous and angry ocean of the world; I cut her hawthers; I delivered her to the tides, It was a grave responsibility.

ABBEVILLE: A charming cathedral, surmounted by a graceful watch tower, dominated the town. The ancient wooden houses with sculptured beams were situated around a statue of Admiral Courbet holding out his hand "to see if it's raining," as the inhabitants used to say. The latter, shrewd and suspicious Picards, resembled the 15th Century burghers carved on the beam ends of their houses. Although the city was attacked nearly every night by German airplanes, the tradespeople, who were doing magnificent business with the English, refused to be evacuated. Energetic girls braved death to sell postcards and beer to the Tommies. I had sumptuous lodgings in the home of Mademoiselle d'Aumale and took my meals at mess with the General Staff, a group of officers to whom I became more attached than to any I had met up to that time.

The Colonel in charge of operations (G. Branch) was Warre, son of the

famous headmaster of Eton. Colonel Warre was an elegant little man celebrated in the British Army for having won the Kadir Cup, for pig-sticking. This exploit of his youth conferred great authority upon his strategic views. His adjutant, Major Wake, also an Etonian, was a descendant of Hereward the Wake, the last Saxon who fought against the Normans at the time of William the Conqueror. Sarcastic, paradoxical, brilliant and highly educated, he later on became the *Major Parker* of my book, but with a mixture of Colonel Jenner, Assistant Adjutant General and descendant of Jenner, inventor of vaccine. Douglas, the General's aide-de-camp, was a young artillery officer who had been seriously wounded and who shared my office; he played rag-time on my typewriter, tossed my papers about and gave voice to hunting-cries whenever I was struggling with the telephone. Much simplified, he was the *Dundas* of the book.

I had a great deal of work. General Asser was responsible for the defense and organization of an immense territory administered by French authorities. The relations with the latter were close and sometimes difficult. Often I would have to jump into a car and rush to make peace in some small village which believed it was insufficiently defended against airplanes, or in the heart of some French general wounded by a too-peremptory British order.

Moreover, now that I had become an interpreter with the rank of an officer, I was in command of a detachment of about thirty liaison agents, and had to watch over them, pay them and keep an eye on their conduct. One of "my men" was Jacques de Breteuil, a friend of the Prince de Galles, and another was the orientalist Eustache de Lorey. They all did their work well and gave me little trouble; for my part, I left them alone and paid them no more attention than I was forced to.

General Asser was much less intimate with me than General Welch, rarely descending from his Olympus to mix with mortals (except occasionally like Jupiter and for the same reasons) but he often made use of me in his work and on official visits. When Clémenceau came to the Somme front, we went with him. Later President Poincaré and King George V were to meet at Abbeville, and I was instructed to go to the station and accompany the President.

"You will detain him for a quarter of an hour," General Asser said to me, "because the King wants to talk to some Kaffir chieftains, and this will delay our schedule a bit."

This curious mission earned me the imprecations of the French general who was accompanying the President,

and my first highly embarrassed conversation with Monsieur Poincaré.

"What's the meaning of this?" the General demanded. "The King keeps the President waiting because he wants to talk to Negroes? It's unbelievable!"

"But General," I said, "there is a reason. . . . These are the head men of the Kaffir workers who made an agreement for just one year and who now want to go home. . . . These workmen, however, are urgently needed to dig trenches, and it is hoped the King's prestige will make them stay."

"All right," Monsieur Poincaré said resignedly. "But it's ridiculous for me to wait in this station. Can't the itinerary be extended a little?"

"Alas, no, Monsieur le President, because police measures have already been taken along the appointed route."

"Very well! Then we'll go slowly, but let's get off!"

The General seized me by the shoulders:

"Let's get off! Good Lord, let's get off!" he cried.

I had almost gained the prescribed quarter of an hour, and we set off. Above us wheeled the Stork Squadron, on watch above the leaders of the two nations.

During the latter part of the war, Abbeville was bombarded by German airplanes every night that was clear enough. We had anti-aircraft guns, but they never hit anything. Never were attacks more uniform. About ten o'clock in the evening a cannon would sound the *alerte*. Twenty minutes later one heard the broken-winded whine of the German bombers. Flares illuminated the town and the nearby munitions depots. There would be a quarter of an hour of pyrotechnics. Then it was over for that night. People went to see the craters, which were sometimes very large; the dead, few in numbers, were counted; and everyone went to sleep with his mind at rest. After the breakthrough in the Fifth Army front, the attacks at times became heavier, and we tried sleeping in the suburbs and returning to work in the morning. But this was tiring and uncomfortable, and the General Staff soon got tired of it. Surprise plays a large part in any fear of danger; as soon as it's well known, familiarity puts an end to fear, and laziness to precautions.

THE end of 1917, for me as for everyone else, was unhappy. The war seemed endless, victory improbable. A vague shadow darkened my personal life. I sought refuge in fiction. For a long time, as I have said, the characters had been growing inside me, nourished by my reveries. They were inspired in part by imagination, in part by the officers I had met in the Ninth Division, and in part, too, by my friends and com-

rades on Asser's staff. A taciturn Colonel Bramble, made up from ten colonels and generals compounded and kneaded together; a *Major Parker*, who was a combination of Wake and Jenner; a *Doctor O'Grady*, who was in part Dr. James; and a padre whom I had met and learned to love among the Scotsmen, had little by little taken shape. During the nights in Abbeville, while I waited for the whine of the German planes, in order to escape my somber thoughts I set to work recording the conversations of these men.

Very soon these dialogues became a book. In my leisure moments I tapped it out on the staff typewriter while Douglas gave voice to hunting-cries. Then I found a title: "The Silences of Colonel Bramble." What was I to do with this little work, which I kept polishing and repolishing? I really had no idea at all. Publish it? No, that seemed too difficult, if not completely impossible. But I could give it to a few friends and, most important of all, I could record in it the fantastic duets of gramophone and artillery fire, the tremolo of the machine-guns and the melody of anguish—and thus be delivered from them. When the book was finished, Raymond Woog, who had come to Abbeville to paint General Asser's portrait, read my manuscript.

"It *must* be published," he said.

"But I don't know any publisher," I objected.

One of my friends replied that nothing was simpler, and undertook to deliver my manuscript to a young publisher of whom he spoke very highly—Bernard Grasset.

Soon a reply came: Grasset liked the book and was ready to publish it. Since I was an officer on active service, I had to have authorization from the Mission. The latter was very reluctant. Commandant de Casteja, who was our chief of personnel, summoned me to Montreuil:

"I find your little book very entertaining," he said. "But you can't publish it under your own name! . . . The English officers with whom you are living or have lived might recognize themselves and be offended. If there is the slightest complaint, it will be this unhappy Mission that will be blamed. . . . No, we give you our moral authorization, but you must use a pseudonym."

This disappointed me, because as a young and unknown author, almost the only readers I could count on were my friends in Normandy and my old comrades in the Lycée and the Regiment, who would not be able to recognize me under a pseudonym. Finally I resigned myself and selected the first name *André*, in memory of my cousin who had been killed in action, and *Maurois*, the name of a

village near Cambrai, because I liked its sad sonority. . . . *André Maurois*. . . . How strange and new those syllables sounded to me then!

Meanwhile Grasset was printing "The Silences." He sent me the first proofs. They arrived at the time when the Germans were advancing on Amiens in March, 1918. For several days I believed the war was lost. Long streams of refugees pushing wheelbarrows full of furniture, children's toys and potatoes, came through Abbeville. To establish and provision a new front, we worked day and night. The bombings were redoubled. Thousands of trucks, rushing up French troops to seal the breach, maintained an uninterrupted rumble beneath our windows. I found reassurance in the calm of General Asser.

"It will be all right," he said to me.

When my book appeared, the battle was still raging, and the fate of Amiens, where I often went, remained undecided. One day in Abbeville I received thirty small gray volumes printed on filled paper and with covers bearing the portrait of a Scotch colonel drawn for me by Raymond Woog. The hour was so dark that I got no pleasure from seeing my first book.

"Send these copies," Grasset wrote me, "to the critics you know."

I didn't know any critics, or for that matter any writers. I decided to send the copies to my friends, and also to the men I admired. For Anatole France I composed an oddly archaic dedication in verse. And for Rudyard Kipling, an adaptation of a little English poem of the Sixteenth Century.

I SOWED this poor grain without hope, at the time when Ludendorff was attacking in Champagne. The harvest and the victory came with equal speed. Because this slender volume appeared at a time of anguish, because it brought a melancholy humor to our woes, because it opened the door to hope, because it portrayed our allies sympathetically, its success was immediate. . . .

More important to me than the number of my readers was the quality of the criticisms. My first reviews were delightful. Since I was completely unknown, I had no enemies, I irritated no one and I could be praised without reservation. I was an officer in the army, and this further entitled me to everyone's kindness. But above all there was in France, and there still is, a real generosity in the Republic of Letters which prompts men of established reputation to help new writers. Abel Hermant, Daniel Halévy, Pierre Mills and Lucien Descaves, who did not know me at all, spoke of "The Silences" with a warmth that touched me. Anatole France wrote me (or rather caused to be written to me)

an amiable letter in which he asked me to come and see him at La Bechellerie. Kipling replied to me himself. Marshal Lyautey, to whom I had not sent my book but who had read it, wrote me care of my editor a dazzling letter: "My dear comrade! Good Lord! What an astonishing book!" The leaders of the French Military Mission suddenly discovered my existence. The Commander-in-Chief Sir Douglas Haig, when he came to Abbeville, asked to see me and talked to me laughingly about *Colonel Bramble*, as also did Monsieur Clémenceau when, with his felt hat cocked for battle and cane in hand, he inspected our armies.

The tiger still roared, but the victory tamed him. From the time that the German attack against Gouraud's Army was stopped, we went on from victory to victory. Beneath the blows of the French, English and American troops, the enemy line which had been so long invulnerable, staggered and gave ground. One felt the end was near. I ought to have experienced an unmixed happiness—and naturally I was happy at the salvation of France; but my personal life had been overturned. Without warning a telegram, signed by a doctor, had summoned me to the Cap d'Ail to my wife, who was very ill. I had great difficulty in getting permission to go there for two days. Her condition seemed so serious that I implored my superiors to allow me to remain with her. General Welch replied with friendly sympathy but with firmness that at that moment my post could not be filled without preparation by any other. I had to take my wife back to Paris and leave her in the hands of doctors, abandoning the being I loved most in the world at the instant when she had greatest need of me.

I was so worried that the victory itself seemed to me a distressing routine. On the day of the Armistice, my English comrades, from General Asser to General Welch, from Colonel Warre to Childe Douglas, decided to give me a surprise. At the end of dinner they rose, forced me to remain seated and sang with great seriousness: "*For he is a jolly good fellow.*" Then they presented me with a beautiful silver platter on which they had had their signatures engraved. I was touched. Their affection, as I well knew, was sincere; for my part I had learned to esteem and love them. Our paths were soon to part. What would be left for me in the new world of the peace? The mill? I felt myself very far removed from that calling. . . . The two brilliant and dependable young men who were to have formed a team with me were both gone. . . . My family? I felt that even if Janine should recover, my home had been

cruelly shaken by absence, by hostile influences, by Destiny.

No doubt I had found a new form of happiness in writing, but what does success amount to, even in a profession which one pursues with enthusiasm, if one has no one to share it with? My wife had seemed indifferent to this new aspect of my life. My dearest friends were dead. Almost nothing remained of the edifice patiently constructed in the first part of my life. On this evening of victory, I felt exhausted and beaten. A few days later I developed a high fever. It was the famous Spanish grippé then ravaging the armies. . . . After a long convalescence, I was demobilized at the beginning of 1919. I was thirty-three years old. In a few months my hair had turned white.

AND this was not the only change that had occurred in me. When I left Elbeuf in 1914 I had been a provincial business man, convinced that nothing in the world was more important than the happiness of my home, the successful operation of my factory. My little town, my little house, my little family seemed to me the center of the universe. I and mine were a part of an enduring and immutable system with established laws, the knowledge of which allowed one to foresee events and to act wisely. The war had shown me that empires under the impact of violence may fall in ruins in a few days, just as the noblest edifices of a great city may fall in a few seconds beneath the shock of an earthquake, and that the collapse of a state may bury beneath the débris of its laws the greatest fortunes and the happiest homes.

To be sure, I had resolved to return to Elbeuf and take up the yoke there once more, but I prepared to do it without enthusiasm or confidence. I had lost my faith in all that. I too clearly realized the existence of a larger world. I no longer believed in the eternal necessity, or even in the solid durability, of the machine in which I was a wheel; and already in the bottom of my heart I was forming, without ever putting it into exact words, a project that four years earlier would have been inconceivable—to go out and rebuild elsewhere, according to new plans, a life which the war had left in ruins.

Personal friendships and reading, war and travels, had given me some knowledge of England, in so far as one can know a people, which is, alas, very little. Of America I knew nothing. It remained for me what it had been in my childhood, a mixture of Jules Verne and Mark Twain, to which there was now added Charlie Chaplin, André Siegfried and Theodore Dreiser. But in 1927 James Hazen Hyde, who was Paris representative

of the Alliance Française in the United States, proposed to me that I should be the official lecturer of the Alliance for that year. He explained the reasons for his choice. I was becoming, he told me, a pretty well known writer in America. "Bramble" had not been published in the United States, but "Ariel" had had thousands of readers there; "Disraeli" had just been chosen by the Book of the Month Club. In addition, I was now getting my start as a lecturer in Paris. I have told how at twenty I delivered lectures at the People's Universities in Normandy, and how I misguidedly gave it up as the result of unimportant attacks. Nevertheless, I had acquired a taste for public speaking.

My trip to America was an important initiation. I made it alone, being too uncertain of the difficulties and fatigues to take my wife with me. On the *Paris* I learned about life on shipboard for the first time, the ephemeral intimacies it can create, the bracing air of the decks; the women stretched out on deck chairs with their legs wrapped up in blankets by deck stewards as a grocer wraps up a package; and the nightly conversations without end and without subject beneath the stars amid which a reddish moon comes up, leaving a long luminous track upon the surface of the waters. For the first time I saw, on arrival in New York, the airplanes and the birds wheeling about the ship, the fishermen's boats, the noisy launches of the Health Department, the fortified hills which on nearer approach became skyscrapers; the pleasure resorts crowded with quaintly decorated buildings, the picturesque and singular animation of the Hudson River, then Pier 57 of the French Line,

waving handkerchiefs, the mad confusion of the customs shed, and finally the city—the city massive and geometrical and nevertheless monstrous, the city gigantic and yet human.

At the end of a few days I wrote to a woman friend:

Come. Nothing gives one more of a zest for life than a morning on Fifth Avenue. Come. The atmosphere is young, the pedestrians hurry along. The crowds enslaved by the red and green lights, surge forward in waves like the sea. The churches have the appearance of children which other buildings lead by the hand. Come. The locomotives have little bells around their necks like the cows in Switzerland, and the Negro porters wear tortoise-shell glasses like young French women. Come. The valley through which the train is running is called the Naugatuck. It winds among the cliffs like the valley of St. Moritz. From each of the wooden stations one expects to see Charlot emerge dressed as a clergyman. Close to the tracks hundreds of cars are parked in a semi-circle. Come. America is a vast desert interspersed with cases of Fords. Come, ready to believe in life and perhaps even in humanity. Come and try, for a few months, being younger by several centuries.

Just what was it that I had loved so much? Everything—beautiful valleys, stately rivers, the sharp and bracing air of the American autumn, the blazing colors of the trees, the grace of New England villages. And then the youth and confidence. America in 1927 was not doubtful and cynical as it became after the Great Depression. In the universities, the ardor, the desire to learn and the faith in the

future of humanity rested me after so much European negativism. Most of all I had loved the atmosphere of good-will and comradeship in which the social life moved. No doubt there were there, as elsewhere, the hard-heartedness of the wealthy, the enviousness of the unfortunate and the often sterile criticism of the intellectuals. But these reactions, which are native to every society, seemed to me tempered by a real desire not to inflict pain needlessly and by an absence of maliciousness which, to a European, seemed marvelous. When I was about to leave, Paul Claudel, then our Ambassador to Washington, said in a frankly humorous tone:

"No doubt you are now going to write a book about the United States like everyone else?"

"Certainly not," I said. "My visit has only lasted a few weeks."

"Quite right," he said; "that's much too long."

On the *Ile-de-France* which took me back to Europe, I made this note:

What have I gained from these two months? Is my memory of them pleasant or unpleasant? Pleasant, without question. I loved this country. . . . Henceforth I shall remember that over there—quite close to us, only six days at sea away—there is an immense reservoir of strength and friendship. . . . I myself, who am nervous and easily tired, have been healthy, alert and happy for two months, despite a frantic schedule. I felt younger in America. There was a youthful vigor in that fine autumn air that took me out of myself.

From then on I was never to forget the existence beyond the seas of the "reservoir of strength and friendship."

GREEN FIRE-II

An emerald miner in South America fights off bandits.

**by Peter
Rainier**

MIX beryllium with aluminum in a certain way, and you've got an emerald—a white one. There are white emeralds; I've mined them by the hatful. So far, it sounds quite simple, and man can synthetically make a white emerald as easily as he makes a synthetic diamond, but only nature knows how to add to the emerald that dash of chromium which turns it green. The more chromium in the mixture the darker the green color and the more valuable the gem. A white emerald is merely a geological curiosity, worth nothing in dollars and cents; while the dark-green bit of fire which is a first-grade emerald may be worth anything up to five thousand dollars a carat. . . .

The Chibcha Indians of the high plateau of Colombia mined emeralds from Chivor before the Spanish conquest. Soon after the conquest, the Spaniards were shown Chivor. According to a Spanish historian, "the Indians were reluctantly persuaded to disclose the source of the green gem." "Reluctantly persuaded" is a good term. Hanging by one toe over a slow fire was probably one of the methods of persuasion used. . . . Whatever the dubious means by which they had acquired it, the Spaniards began to

develop the mine just before the middle of the Sixteenth Century. For a hundred years they continued to develop it, until the conquest of the Muzo Indians, in the Carare valley, opened up a temporarily more attractive and virgin source of supply.

Chivor lay abandoned after the discovery of Muzo. From the middle of the Seventeenth Century till early in the Twentieth, no man trod the deep valleys and vast mountain slopes of the region. But at the close of the Nineteenth Century a young English adventurer, Chris Dixon, made a fabulously rich strike in the Muzo region. The news rejuvenated the industry.

It was Pacho Restrep, the Antioquinian, who picked on the lost Chi-

vor mine as his quarry. Like most of his fellow-citizens of the *Departamento* of Antioquia in Colombia, Pacho was a stout fellow. He needed to be, if he were to rediscover Chivor. But stout old Pacho did have one clue. In his history of the Spanish Conquest, Fray Simone, the priestly historian, had written of Chivor: "The mines of Chivor are situated on the point of a ridge from which the *llanos* of the Orinoco can be seen." To one who knows the region that seems a slender clue. But, still, a clue it was and Pacho set out to follow it—climb to the top of every ridge in that forest sea.

Years went by. Don Pacho's once substantial fortune began to grow attenuated with the strain of maintaining in such an uninhabited wilderness the force of men required. Meat was scarce, and Don Pacho's men depended for their meat ration on what the forests provided—squirrels darting along the fern-wreathed branches of the huge yellow laurel or cedar trees; coneys in their holes in the rocky cliffs; the fat *buruga*—the South American version of the North American ground-hog. It was a *buruga* that found Chivor for Don Pacho. One of his Indians chased the sluggish animal into a hole and proceeded to dig it out. After a yard or so of digging, the opening widened. The Indian entered and stood upright. Regular walls and arched roof, the opening had. A tunnel! In the soft rock through which it had been driven were the pick-marks of Indian slaves—now dead three centuries or more.

The "lost" mine of Chivor had been found.

Don Pacho spent the scanty remnant of his fortune on developing his find. His luck was small: a few emeralds of low value. In the end he was glad enough to unload it on an American syndicate.

Chivor would produce worth-while emeralds. I knew it. Don Marco knew it too, and never during daylight hours relaxed his grim perambulations round the working-places in the pit. No Indian miner could reach down to pick up something from the ground without Marco's shadow falling across him with a demand to see what he had picked up. The Indian miners knew it also, and redoubled their efforts to win the bonus.

Well before the expiration of the time limit, we did make our find. As good luck would have it, I was within a few feet of the spot when it happened—I'd done everything but sleep in that pit for weeks. Epaminondas struck it (blame the parish priests for the classical names so many of the Colombian Indians bear: When an Indian mother has named her eldest son Jesus and her eldest daughter Maria, she has exhausted her repertory of

names and relies on the parish priest to supply the deficiency at the christening of the remaining installments of her family).

One of Don Pacho's veterans was Epaminondas. Worked on the mine, he had, ever since Don Pacho had discovered it, and felt almost as though he owned it. A sturdy, grizzled old warrior with a reputation as a knife fighter, he affected a floppy straw hat over his lank black hair and a brightly colored sash over the rags which clothed him.

This occasion was quite different from the original discovery some months before. Nothing hysterical about old Epaminondas. Just as my eye happened to rest on him, the old boy leaned forward, gazed at something which the point of his eight-foot crowbar had turned up, and promptly planted one splayed foot on it.

Slowly his head turned till he caught sight of me.

"*Su Merced*. I have it." Quite calm about it.

In a second I was on the spot.

THE Indian removed his gnarled bare foot, disclosing a thin green streak similar to the one Jesus had found, only more clearly defined. No isolated pocket, this one, evidently; a vein—walls well defined, and the green content two inches wide! Big for an emerald vein. If I didn't get emeralds by following that vein, I'd be willing to throw in my hand and agree with the rest of the mining world that Chivor was a dud. Good color too—a dark, dull green. If that dark mineral had in places crystallized into emeralds, they would be valuable.

"Good, Epaminondas, good! But the bonus was to be paid for the first emerald this time—not for the trail of the *tigre* only. Catch me the *tigre* now. Strike again with your bar and open the vein for me. There are emeralds in it, I know."

I leaned forward with bated breath as I waited for the stroke of the crowbar which would remove a section of the rocky walls that enclosed the dark green streak, like a layer of green peppermint between two yellow layers of cake, with the cake turned on edge.

But Epaminondas made no stroke. Instead he grinned at me as he leaned upon his heavy bar. Then he lifted one prehensile foot, sole upward, for me to see. Between the first and second toes was a glint of green. I held out my open palm, and an emerald fell into it.

If I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget that stone. Later I had it mounted in its native state as a brooch for Margaret, my wife. A bit barbaric it looks, by some people's standards, but at least it is unusual. More, it is unique, because there is no other like it: each emerald before cut-

ting has its own individuality, and it is only the lapidary's lack of imagination that shapes two cut gems alike. Anyway, it gave pleasure to the recipient. Margaret treasured it, and our daughter Marge inherited it from her. On each of the six sides of the hexagon Nature had put a polish which no lapidary could hope to emulate. All emeralds are hexagons, or fragments of a hexagon.

The finder had earned his bonus.

With Epaminondas as my sole helper, I set to work to explore the vein further, having moved the remainder of the gang to another working-place a safe distance away. One man is enough to watch when you are reaping the hard-won harvest of many months of costly work. Even one man might ease an emerald from me. Once Epaminondas got those splay feet of his over a gem, he could retain it between his toes till he went home from work. Epaminondas honest? Because he had returned to me the emerald he had secreted? The old devil had known I was there, and was afraid I might have spotted his foot going over it! Otherwise that emerald would have gone for *aguardiente*.

With my geologist's pick I hewed a little level shelf in front of the low vertical face of rock in which the vein was exposed.

"Strike, Epaminondas!" I crouched, expectant.

Epaminondas straddled his short legs while his flexible toes felt for a grip on the slippery rock surface. Slowly his heavy crowbar rose; with a grunt he struck. The sharp steel point split the rock on one side of the vein, loosening a piece about two feet square.

Gently Epaminondas swayed the bar to and fro. Under that purchase the fissure opened till I could see that a section of the green vein had adhered to the loosened yellow rock. How green that inner surface showed! With both hands I grabbed the rock and eased it gently over till the green surface was on top. Here and there in the dull green beryl were hexagonal shapes, opaque. They had the shape and color of the emerald but not the translucency and luster—semi-formed emeralds. Gently I scraped the point of my little pick over the green surface. At one place the pick broke through. There was a cavity in the beryl, and the cavity seemed filled with iron oxide which looked like dry powdered iron rust.

Loose in the powder were hard things. One by one I picked them out. Emeralds! Small but marketable! All that day Epaminondas and I worked, exploring the vein deeper and deeper. Before we left it for the night, I sealed it with wet clay and caused tons of debris to be rolled onto it from above—safe from prowlers.

Then I walked back to the camp, placed the emeralds in a bath of hydrochloric acid and cleaned the rusty covering from them. A couple of Grade One stones, the others seconds and thirds, with the usual proportion of rubbish—crushed hexagons that looked all right till you handled them, when they fell to fragments in your hand. At a conservative estimate that day's work had recovered the expenses of three months' mine operation.

MONTH after month passed. By the time my first year on the mine had gone, I had not only shown a profit for that year but gone far to recoup the mine's previous losses.

Month by month the pit deepened. Month by month we explored the veins which our excavations uncovered. At last the character of the rock changed. The silky texture left it. The bottom of the pit was now formed of formation which fractured sharply into jagged edges, quite unlike the square-breaking strata which had produced emeralds. I knew that if we went a mile deeper, not another emerald would we recover. The pit had "bottomed." We must now open a new pit.

Leaving Marco to carry on the preliminaries, I mounted my horse and set out for Bogotá, the saddle wallets which bumped my knees carrying the results of my last year's work.

I rode alone, without an escort, because Marco was the only man I could trust among my employees, and Marco was needed to run the mine in my absence. Better no escort, I felt, than an untrustworthy one. . . . A year or two later—this was when my feud with Joaquin the Bandit had become acute—I will admit that I strapped on a second revolver and rode by night instead of by day.

In Bogotá I rolled a pile of green gems onto the agent's table. He fingered them, held them to the light.

"I congratulate you." He tipped his chair back. "You have proved true what I told you a year ago when you visited me."

"What was that?"

"I remarked that a mine was only as good as the man that ran it."

(When Mr. Rainier got back to the mine, he found the bandit Joaquin had got wind of the find of emeralds, and had attempted to move in with a gang. With the aid of his man Marco, he decided to oust the interloper and staged a surprise night attack:)

I tipped the petrol bottle up, walking rapidly along the back wall of the hut as I did so, then stepped back.

Beside me Marco struck a match, his mouth yawning wide with excitement till his gold-filled teeth glittered in the tiny flare.

He flipped the match forward.

With almost the roar of an explosion the petrol caught. Flames shot up the dry palm-leaf wall before us, and in a second the whole back of the hut was a blazing mass. A cataract of terrified Indians shot out of the farther opening and cascaded down the precipitous slope in front. To speed the departure of our unwanted tenants, Marco and I emptied our revolvers over their heads, but it was hopeless to try to move them any faster—they were traveling all-out already, like rocks in a landslide. Their yells of terror receded downward through the darkening gloom beneath the forest trees—an occasional crash of broken branches, a yelp of pain when one of them slipped and fell. Meantime the cartridges in their now red-hot revolvers popped merrily within the glowing remnant of their hut—not only had we routed the enemy but put most of his armament out of commission. Joaquin's men had evidently laid aside their revolvers while they caroused and had not waited to retrieve them. Now their red-hot weapons peppered the landscape and sent us to cover.

That was the end of Joaquin's "possession" party.

After that I thought Joaquin would surely lie low for a while, but much to my surprise, he came to see me next day. My blood raced when I saw him dismount from his horse and approach me where I stood close to my office. If I were to let myself go, I knew I'd twist the slimy devil's neck.

But just the same, I decided I had played the smooth Latin game of courtesy as long as I could stand it.

He walked toward me and stopped about five paces off. When he stopped, I advanced—close up, so close that if his hand should drop to his weapon, I could hit him under the chin before he could draw. How my fingers were itching to grasp the skinny throat with the big Adam's apple that began dancing up and down at my near approach.

When our faces were almost touching, I halted. One corner of my eye was fixed on his right hand with the thumb hooked over his belt just behind the pearl-handled revolver. He had casually dropped that hand there after I had ignored it when he had held it out in greeting.

Closely I watched that hand. If it should grasp the butt and draw the weapon—there was a trick I knew. The quick grasp of the opponent's weapon as it leaves the holster, the fingers closing over the hammer as it travels back to cock. The twist of the wrist which turns the barrel up into the face of the man who drew it. The quick release which looses the hammer and sends the bullet crashing into the face of the assailant. That would be better than my fist under his jaw—chin he had none. Knowing the trick as I did, the man with the gun had not

a ghost of a chance as long as he allowed me within reach. I blessed the man who had taught me that trick.

So, for a long minute, Joaquin and I stood breast to breast while his Adam's apple oscillated violently. Then he moved back slightly. He did not actually raise his hands over his head but crossed them on his breast. The implication to me was the same as if he had raised them, but it saved his pride from any onlookers.

"Get out, you shameless thief!" I ordered. "If I catch you on the mine again, I'll have my Indians throw you off." I clenched my fist.

Without a word he turned. Watching me apprehensively over one shoulder, he scuttled toward his horse, mounted and rode away. Broken, I felt he was. That would be the last of the annoying business. However tough a man thinks he is, he sooner or later meets a tougher.

But I had grievously underestimated Joaquin the Bandit. The very next day brought me a telegram from him—once out of range of my fist, his courage had returned:

YOUR INSULT INSUPPORTABLE. I
CHALLENGE YOU TO DUEL. NAME
PLACE AND WEAPON.

That made me laugh for a moment, but on further reflection I began to scratch my head. A duel! This wasn't the Middle Ages. And yet in this outlying part of Colombia we still lived in an atmosphere of the Seventeenth Century. And duels were still fought in Colombia. I had heard of one or two although the custom was dying out and was frowned on by the authorities. I knew, too, that this was a serious challenge. Joaquin had had to do something to re-establish his credit with the local firebrands.

BUT I definitely did not want to fight a duel. True, the choice of place and weapon were mine by established custom. Any place at all would do, provided it held no cover for a hidden marksman behind my back—Joaquin, in my opinion, was quite capable of making sure of things by that means. Weapon? What weapon? Knifel I shuddered. Standing outside my house, I was, where every object carried the familiar aspect of a friend. Workmen had been building a stove in my kitchen and homely building materials lay around. Bricks. It was a pile of bricks that gave me the inspiration. The idea struck me all of a heap, and I hastened to show Joaquin's challenge to Marco.

Old Marco waved his hand and raved: "Barbaro! Barbarous! You must refuse."

"I'm going to fight."

Marco spluttered. "No—rather will I report the matter to the Alcalde and have it stopped."

Taking out my pencil, I scribbled a draft of my acceptance on the back of the telegraph form and held it out for Marco to read. Several times he read the message and my answer to it, his lips moving, before their implication dawned on him. Then, for almost the only time in our many years of acquaintance, he burst out laughing.

I had written the following:

ACCEPT CHALLENGE. GUATEQUE
MARKETPLACE. BRICKS AT FIVE
PACES.

Joaquin did not deign to reply, and for some weeks we heard nothing further from him. Then one morning a messenger brought a letter.

Honored Señor Meester,

It is hard for a man of spirit to admit defeat but you have defeated me. This would I tell you in person, but you have forbidden me the mine. It is my intention to abandon my claim and to leave this district where things have not gone luckily for me. But before I go, there are many things I can tell you of your employees which will interest you. Emeralds are being stolen from your mine, and I can name the evil ones who steal them. I will await you on the *Alto del Guyo* at any time you name.

I kiss your hands,

JOAQUIN.

When I showed the letter to Marco that stout friend nearly threw a fit. "An *ambuscado*! It smells plainly of that. He promises to tell you of emerald-thieves to draw you to him."

"It fairly stinks of an ambush," I agreed. "The few emeralds that go missing between the toes of our Indians aren't enough to interest anyone—and he knows it. But I must go, Marco. I'll take plenty of precautions. We'll put some military tactics to work."

Marco's face cleared when I explained in detail my plan. He nodded vehemently and his eyes glittered.

It was the next day when I rode to the *Alto del Guyo*, the "Beak of the Cock." A round green height it was, that jutted from the Chivor ridge like the breast of the forest spirit.

Fifty yards behind me rode Marco, a grim rearguard with a big pistol at his belt. Slightly in front of me, one on either side, went young Miguel and old Epaminondas, armed with shotguns. Invisible those two were, and inaudible—two dim shadows which slipped through the forest on either side of the trail.

Three miles from my home to the *Alto del Guyo*, I estimated the distance. The first half of it passed without incident.

Then, in the solid mass of the forest on my right front, there came the boom of a shotgun. Epaminondas! A howl of pain, and two strange In-

dians dashed across my front not fifty paces ahead. One of them carried a rifle, while the other held both hands clapped to his behind as he sped howling.

I put Marco after them at the gallop, firing from the saddle. Galloping behind me, Marco opened up a regular fusillade till the sound of our firing echoed from the still peaks that watched us scornfully, sweeping the cloud-wisps from their faces, none the less, that they might see the better.

"Boom! Boom!" Miguel's twelve-bore bellowed twice. A right and left, which was punctuated by another howl of agony. There was a violent crashing in the undergrowth, a crashing which rapidly receded.

Now Epaminondas appeared speeding from the direction of his first shot. Two guns he carried. One he cast from him on the trail as he crossed it—the gun which a few moments before had been in the hands of the Indian on whom he had scored a hit. With the long earth-devouring stride of the hunting cheetah, Epaminondas crossed my front, his tongue hanging out like a hound's and his mouth drooling. Drawn blood, had Epaminondas, and reverted three centuries to savagery. God help those snipers if either Epaminondas or Miguel caught them! But I didn't think they would catch them. Terror is fleetier than the blood-thirst.

As Marco and I reloaded our revolvers, we heard one more distant report, then silence.

"Those Indians shoot worse than we do," remarked Marco, closing the breach of his weapon with a jerk. "With shotguns, too." He flipped his revolver into the air, caught it neatly by the butt and holstered it with one swift smooth movement, a trick he was fond of displaying.

I laughed as I holstered my Colt. "They're shooting straight enough. Hitting the mark every time. . . . But I only gave them bird-shot. Didn't want a murder case on my hands. Even so, those snipers will be picking lead out of their hides for weeks."

Solution to Crossword Puzzle on page 104

F	U	S	E	E	R	O	W	S	M	A	L	T			
I	T	E	M	S	A	D	I	T	A	R	I	A			
G	A	M	U	T	M	O	N	I	T	I	O	N	S		
S	H	A	L	E	P	R	E	T	E	N	S	E	S		
	P	O	E	M	S		C	H	E	E	S	E			
I	N	H	U	M	E		A	C	H	E					
C	O	O	S		S	T	I	R		E	V	A	D	E	
E	A	R	L		H	A	D	E	S		A	P	E	R	
S	H	E	Y	K		N	E	W	T		S	P	A	R	
					I	R	K	S		E	S	T	E	R	S
P	L	A	T	T	E				A	P	P	A	L		
R	E	P	R	E	S	S	E	S		A	T	L	A	S	
I	M	P	O	S	T	O	R	S		R	I	A	N	T	
M	O	L	T		E	R	I	E		S	O	N	N	Y	
O	N	E	S		D	E	N	T		E	N	T	E	R	

"They won't stop this side of the Sauchi Pass." Marco gazed to where the gap in the Sauchi Range, two hours' ride away, peeped at us from under the skirt of a trailing cloud. "That *bandido*, Joaquin, will be gone too. Gone to make more trouble." He turned his horse toward home.

"We'll try the *Alto del Guyo* to make sure. I'm willing to bet that Joaquin is sitting there through all this commotion, trying to look as though he hadn't heard it. Smug and righteous-looking." I gathered up my reins.

Fifteen minutes later I rode out of the forest gloom into the clear daylight of the turf-clad peak. Joaquin was there, about thirty feet from the edge of the forest. Thirty feet—close range. That must have been his plan. Those snipers which my Indians had flushed would have followed me up and blown a hole through my back while I talked to Joaquin, and that smooth devil would have had a perfect alibi—talking to me face to face while I was shot behind. Now I felt like shooting him in cold blood as he stood there, ankle-deep in green turf.

I TETHERED Moro on the edge of the forest and walked toward Joaquin, my hand menacingly on the butt of my heavy .38.

"Well?" Rage plugged my throat so that I could hardly speak.

Joaquin began to speak rapidly and at length.

One of my eyes was on him, and the other on the forest behind him as he faced me. A bush moved there. A small bush just outside the forest shadow and within twenty feet of Joaquin. Soundlessly the leaves of the small bush were being agitated. Something poked through them. Something black and shiny with a hole in the middle that seemed to point at Joaquin's back. Good old Marco! The man would have made a first-class scout in war.

"Joaquin!" I jerked the word at him.

His discourse faltered—stopped.

I pointed at the bush. He turned to follow my finger. Pallid his face went, pale green. His darting black eyes widened. The man thought he was going to be shot from ambush, as he had planned for me. He gasped. Then he began to pray.

I waved him to where his horse stood tethered on the far side of the open space.

"Get out. Next time you try any tricks, you'll really be shot. I could have killed you half a dozen times, but you weren't worth it."

Like a man wading through swift water, he staggered to his horse and rode away. I never set eyes on Joaquin again, although he did resume an interest in Chivor affairs after I had left the mine.

"Look, is this money hot?" Mike asked. . . . "It aint stolen," Lucius groaned, "but—"



The WORLD Is My WITNESS

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by *George Armin Shaftel*



AFTER pushing the bell button, I waited on the front porch for somebody to come to the door. My pulse was racing. This was going to be something of an ordeal.

The doorknob turned.

I hadn't heard footsteps approach the door inside, and for an instant I was startled. I got ready to say "How are you? Long time no see!"

The doorknob turned back. The door didn't open at all. That was odd.

I flare up easily. I grabbed the doorknob, turned it and pushed the door open—and just stood there, taken aback. The hall was empty. Nobody was there at all.

But I *had* seen the doorknob turn!

"Hello! Anybody home?"

I got no answer. But a radio was bringing in some swing music at the back of the house. So somebody must be home.

Down the hallway I walked. To the right, an arch opened onto the big living-room. I noticed absently that the heavy old mahogany furniture was gone, replaced by the modernistic new stuff that makes you think of svelte blondes—it's all slim and smooth and honey-yellow and plenty expensive.

"Lucius?" I called, and walked on to the kitchen.

A small radio sat on a shelf over a corner dinette. Here a table was all set for breakfast. Coffee was percolating like mad in an electric coffee-maker, and blue smoke was rising from a toaster which needed unloading.

Something else caught my eye and held me staring.

"Now what's happened?"

A coffee-cup was overturned on the table, and brown liquid still dripped from the linen onto the floor. A chair with chromium legs sprawled on its back; and on the linoleum were pieces of broken dishes. I pursed my lips and wondered if a nice breakfast had been interrupted by a quarrel. Then I noticed little clusters of small white beads on the floor, like pearls. Also, on the expensive linoleum were some reddish-brown splotches that weren't coffee-stains. All of a sudden this didn't look funny any more. I picked up some of the beads.

"They are pearls."

Somebody had been wearing a string of pearls, and the string had broken and the pearls had scattered on the floor. Somebody had picked up the pearls, then! But that somebody had been in such a hurry that the smaller beads had

been overlooked. . . . I bent again, and I ran my finger across some of that red-brown stain. I held my finger to the light, and my heart crowded up into my throat. This stain was *not* coffee.

I nearly jumped out of my skin then, when the telephone on the shelf near by pealed out.

Grabbing the receiver, I mumbled: "H'lo?"

"I've phoned for the police, Lucius!" an excited voice yelled into my ear. "A squad car should be there any minute now. I'm coming right over! If Lathburn shows up before we get there *humor* him. Don't be afraid. Stall him some way. Give him whatever he wants. Just keep him busy until help arrives!"

And the man slammed down his phone at the other end as if he wasn't wasting a second getting into action.

It took me two tries to cradle the phone, and I stood there, blinking, wondering, upset.

You see, my name is Lathburn. Roger Lathburn.

I SUPPOSE there's nothing can give you much of a shock as barging unsuspectingly into a tragic situation. I came home that morning after being gone eight years.

I'd walked out of the house when my stepfather insisted that I quit college and go into his business. He'd had a big junk-yard and was making money selling scrap iron to Japan, and Japan was making that scrap iron into black-outs for the lamps of China. I wasn't interested in helping tear men apart; I was interested in helping put them back together—in surgery. So I and the old man had words. I ended with him yelling that I'd never get another dollar of his; and with me slamming his door behind me. I went back to medical school. After my hospital internship, I obtained a job on the liner *President Washington* of the Star Funnel Lines. When my stepfather died, I was in Shanghai. He'd left me one dollar in his will. The estate, such as it was, went to my two cousins, Mike Norredge and Lucius Midleigh.

Now I was back in the old town again.

Last night, I'd phoned Lucius. He'd asked me to come to breakfast this morning. Said he had a surprise for me. He'd said it rather complacently, so I guessed that he was going to show off how he'd come up in the world. So I had hired a car, and driven out, and turned up into the familiar driveway with a feeling of homesickness.

The place had been my home as far back as I could remember; here my mother had died when I was ten. And

though I had walked out on my stepfather, red-faced with anger, there had been plenty of times since when I would have crawled back on my knees if that had been possible. . . .

My hands shaking, I put the telephone back on the shelf. Lucius was to *humor* me. To *stall* me off until help came. Lucius was to give me whatever I wanted and keep me busy until the police arrived. Lucius hadn't acted afraid of me when he'd asked me to come to breakfast. So why should he have phoned a friend that I was coming to—to commit mayhem on him or something? Why wasn't he here now? "Hell of a reception for a long-lost relative," I muttered.

I took a quick look through the old house. There wasn't another person on the place.

I REMINDED myself, then, that Lucius' friend had started the police here. Unless I left, a prowler car would pull up out front, and cops would come in and grab me and take me to a station-house to question me and to make me prove that I was a decent citizen without larcenous motives. Besides, there was that red-brown stain on the kitchen linoleum.

"Maybe I'd be smart to get out of here and find Lucius and make him explain some of this," I decided. Lord knows, it's a lot easier to convince a cop you're respectable in an expensive hotel room than in a station-house.

I'd left my rented car in the driveway out front. I walked out of the house, and in spite of myself I felt furtive.

My car was where I'd left it. I grabbed the door-handle to get in—and froze.

Somebody was sitting in the front seat: a girl—a black-haired girl—a lovely young woman in a frivolous house-coat over a lacy negligée.

"Get in," she said.

Her voice was low and strained. Under her dark eyes were black shadows like bruises. She kept one hand pressed against her side. The other hand gripped a small automatic. She gestured with it.

"Get in," she said again. Abruptly she swayed a little where she sat, and her lovely face tightened with agony. "Take me to 339 Marin Drive, please."

The *please* wasn't begging—just polite. Something was the matter with her. Something was horribly the matter with her, yet she could be insistent and polite.

I slid under the wheel, started the motor and backed the car out of the driveway.

As I turned down the street, the swing of the turn swayed the girl toward me. . . . She was limp and heavy against my shoulder. The little automatic slipped from her fingers and clattered onto the floor-boards.

"—Marin Drive," she was saying again, but her voice was a strangled gasping.

I looked at her. Her house-coat had come open, and under her left breast was an appalling wound.

"You've got to go to a hospital!" I said.

She didn't answer. She was leaning more heavily against me than before. I didn't waste a second, but pushed the throttle down hard.

I cut through a traffic light, took a turn so sharp the tires screamed protest, and tore across a pedestrian crossing, scaring some women. But presently I realized that all my hurry wasn't any use. I wouldn't get to the hospital in time. The girl had been dying when I first got into the car.

I recalled, then, that when I'd phoned Lucius last night, he'd said that he had a surprise for me. "Some surprise!" Lucius had sounded so damned complacent over the phone!

I could have taken her to the Pacific Hospital. It was the nearest, and instinctively I drove that way. But I passed it by; and went on to the St. Bartholomew's, which was a few blocks farther. The delay would mean nothing to the dead woman.

You see, I had interned at the Pacific, for two years. And busy, driving years they had been, in which it seemed I had learned several lifetimes of knowledge about medi-

cine and people. Strangely enough, no one memory of those crowded years stuck in my mind nearly as vividly as something which had happened to me when I was eight years old. I'd been in the children's wing of the Pacific, then, coming down with diphtheria. I was a diphtheria-carrier, they had decided at the time. One night, alone in a room, I'd wakened in a fright. I was sure that rats were running over my bed. I could feel them through my blanket. I pulled it over my head and knotted up in fear. I yelled for the nurse. She came and tried to soothe me, and left. Presently the rats were back again, and I yelled some more. An interne came and soothed me, and left the lights burning.

Well, I realized after a bit that I was feeling seams in the blanket against my knees and toes. Something of the sort. There were no rats. Yet the *feel* of rats had been so terrifying vivid. Probably I had wakened in fear. Probably the dread and anxiety which for some time had been stirring and growing in the deeps of my mind had boiled over while I dozed—and my conscious thoughts tried to account for that abiding fright by conjuring up rats. The memory of that night loomed out of my childhood now, dimming the busier and more normal memories of my internship, fifteen years later. For that uneasy dread was something basic in me.

I didn't stop at the Pacific Hospital now because I was running away from that memory. Just as, all my life, I'd been running away from my childhood. My job as physician on a round-the-world cruise ship—why, I had deliberately taken a leave, so as to come home now, because I'd realized that my job itself was just a prolonged running away from my boyhood. Even my walking out on my stepfather nine years ago had literally been flight. *Escape*.

It was what had happened to me as a child, and what had happened to my mother, which had profoundly grooved my thoughts and feelings into panic and need for escape. Finally, of course, I had grown enough in experience to realize that I must explain my childhood to myself, that I must bring its problems out into the light of day and see them for what they were, or I'd never know peace. I'd never be able to put down roots and grow securely in a background I found congenial. Behind my psychological problem, no doubt, was an only child's fixation upon his mother. She had died, as I've said, when I was ten. My memories of her were of a slim, lovely young woman who always had time for me, who always had laughter and love for me; but who had suffered greatly, and greatly had tried to hide that suffering from me. She had died, it seemed to me, *gladly*. Don't ask me how a child could have sensed that. I can only tell you what to me is true. . . . A mature man, now, I had to find out what happened to my mother to cast such a tragic shadow over my childhood.

Reaching St. Bartholomew's, I had the dead girl brought inside, and I told a story of almost running into her as she staggered across a street. I showed my credentials, and my story was accepted. The hospital people merely asked for my local address so that the police could reach me when they investigated.

This would be soon; if I wanted to do some personal probing into this young woman's death, I had to get busy.

RETURNING to my rented car, I started for 339 Marin Drive.

Familiar scenes hit hard upon my nerves as I drove across town. Driving the road along the river, I thought of fool things I'd done: Wading in shallows dotted with quicksands. Riding a raft of planks perilously lashed over a couple of oil-drums after a storm had deepened the river. Lord, what kids will do and get away with! Parents come by their gray hairs the hard way.

Turning my car, I cut into the Graymoor Park hills.

The bridle-path still ran along their fringe, though the riders in jodhpurs and dainty derbies didn't look quite as

handsome and aristocratic as I remembered them. And swinging out of the park gates, I saw that they still held a faded sign: *Park Gates Closed at 8 P.M.* I reflected wryly that the city fathers still declared a closed season on lovers' lanes.

Reaching Marin Drive, I suddenly realized something with a shock of surprise. I was going to 339 Marin Drive because the young woman who had died in my car had asked me to take her there. And—339 Marin Drive was the address of my cousin Mike Norredge's place of business....

It was a small radio station.

Out in front were two small towers of steel girders, and strung between them was a neon sign forming station letters K-R-O.

I walked into the reception-room. Against the walls were padded benches and armchairs, and at the back was the receptionist's desk, behind a railing. In the back wall was a door to the hall which led to the offices and control-room and sound stages.

I walked past people waiting to get inside, to the receptionist's desk. Behind it sat a paunchy, sharp-eyed little man. On the desk was a block with his name in brass letters: *IZZY BAYLON*.

I said, "I want to see Mr. Norredge."

"Your name and business?"

"My name's Lathburn. Personal business."

"I'll let you in as soon as Mr. Norredge can see you."

He shunted me into a chair with a wave of his pudgy hand, and picked up an office phone and rasped my name into it. I sat down next to a wizened, gray-haired little chap who gave me a friendly grin. The other men waiting weren't so cordial; they sat with the bored, impatient look of people who know they have to wait but who hate it.

THE front door opened, and a girl came in. She was tall, lithe and shapely of figure. You could just feel the miasma of boredom and impatience in the room lighten as she walked to Izzy's desk. There was something vivid and instantly likable about her. She was about twenty-five, and she had shining red-brown hair and clear gray eyes alight with humor.

"I'd like to see Mr. Norredge," she told Izzy. "My name is Laurens, Daisymae Laurens."

"You'll have to wait."

She looked at her wrist-watch and with a tiny sigh of resignation she turned to take a chair. The wizened little man beside me jumped up and offered her his armchair with a flourish. She smiled her thanks and sat down. And I thought to myself that women were suckers for the most trifling of gallantries; and if more of us men but realized that, how much more serenely the world would wag.

"A great guy, Mike Norredge," the little man said, pointing to a poster on the wall showing Mike's handsome face with a toothy grin as he talked into a microphone. "Best announcer in the business!"

"Yes, indeed. Golden Adenoids himself. Not even his tonsils were born to blush unseen."

"He's giving me a job."

"You're a sound engineer?"

"I'm an actor," he said. "But not a very good one. Often a ham, but never a *Hamlet*!"

I joined in on their laugh. Miss Laurens had a wholesome hearty laugh that was very attractive.

"My name's Will Randle," the little man said. "You looking for a job, too, Miss Laurens?"

"I am out of work. I played *Prunella Prim* on the Pacific Petrol Hour until I had a car accident some months ago. I'm dickering for a new contract now, and I've got to keep up a front. So—I've come to ask Mike for my back alimony. I'm his ex-wife."

This girl was *Prunella Prim*! I stared. *Prunella Prim* was a comic radio character, a modern *Mrs. Malaprop*, a pixilated old battle-ax with a voice like a shovel grating on concrete. It was hard to believe. This attractive young

woman with the lovely low voice, with a warmth and magnetism of personality that was like a rise of temperature in the room—she was that whacky Witch of Endor who was always opening her mouth and putting her foot in it clear to the eyebrows. She must be an actress of real skill.

Coming to ask Mike for back alimony! So Mike was hard up—needed money. Nine times out of ten, you can trace a crime back to somebody needing money. I grew tense. I'd come here to find out why that girl who had died in my rented car had started here with a gun in her hand. Well, here was a background for crime, though I did hate to think that likable Mike Norredge—

A LOUD-SPEAKER in the wall rasped:

This is Station KRO . . . Friends, we continue our Looking-glass Program with those mad bad wags—Sue and Joe. Spill the dirt, pals!"

Izzy switched the loud-speaker off as the phone rang. "Hello? Who? . . . Eddie Cantor? The face is familiar but I can't place the name . . . G'wan, Eddie, can't you take a joke? How do you ever get anything to broadcast? . . . Yeah, the boss'll help out on the benefit program. You can always count on him. Be seein' you."

He cradled the phone and turned around and his sour, pugnacious face lit up as he said: "Hello, Miss Cecily!"

I looked around. A girl had come in. She was smart as a magazine cover in a man-tailored suit and silver fox fur. Her blonde hair had a living golden radiance. Her eyes were bright azure under dark lashes. Her patrician features had a chiseled, classic perfection. She would have been too good to be true, save for her self-conscious expression. She *knew* how lushly she filled her sheer stockings!

"Hello, Izzy," she said. She had a nice voice that tried hard not to be affected.

"Mike's busy, but if you want to go right in—"

"Oh, no, Izzy. I'll wait, thanks."

Izzy leaned over the railing and pushed a chair forward for her, and she sat down, precisely crossing her silken ankles and pushing her silver fox back on her shoulders, acutely aware that we were all staring at her, but not letting her glance meet ours. . . . So she was a privileged visitor around here! Well, I thought, if Mike preferred *her* to his ex-wife—then Mike's tastes were expensive and phony. And if Mike liked 'em blonde and costly, and was hard up for cash, then Mike was ripe for crime if there wasn't a lot of integrity in his character.

The outside door slammed behind another visitor.

The man who came in was a big, billowy, blubbery chap in a dandified suit of pin-striped blue that had probably cost plenty when new, but hadn't been pressed in months. His mousy brown hair was plastered over a very naked-seeming bald spot; his eyes, of a lackluster and nondescript gray, protruded slightly, while his chin receded with almost indecent haste. He carried a Gladstone bag with both hands, as if afraid somebody would snatch it from him; and he bustled up to Izzy Baylon's desk.

"I want to see Mr. Norredge. My business is urgent!"

"You'll have to tell me, or wait."

"Damn it, I can't waste time talking to a fool!"

"I can. Explain, or wait."

By this time I was recognizing the chubby man. I hadn't seen my cousin Lucius in almost nine years.

"I'll have you fired. You let me in, or—"

"Sit down!" Izzy snapped so viciously that Lucius backed away.

Evidently Lucius had hay fever. He started sneezing. He probed an inhalator from his pocket, rammed it into each nostril in turn and drew two measured, gusty breaths into each side. I winced. Those sniffs of benzedrine should have knocked the top of his head off.

And then Izzy Baylon, the inter-office phone to his ear, beckoned to me. "Mike wants to see you now."

I walked down the corridor to Mike's inner office.

"Gosh, Roger, I'm glad to see you!"

Mike shook my hand and pushed a chair forward for me and went on talking in a breathless rush that seemed habitual:

"Where've you been? How's the world treating you? You never wrote to me! Gosh, boy, you're looking good!"

A gust of cool fresh air, this Mike Norredge. He was a little over medium height, broad-shouldered and vigorous. He wasn't handsome, but he *seemed* handsome, he was so likable, so quick to smile. His hair was sandy, his eyes a keen gray with crow's-feet of good humor and shrewdness.

"I've been a ship's surgeon," I answered.

"Nice! Married?"

"No."

"Say, Roger—" He hesitated, his keen young face reddening. "You got a dirty deal, in Uncle's will. Left you just one dollar, didn't he?"

"Uh-huh. Never did collect it, either."

"Well, part of what was left to me is this radio station. I've liquidated the other bits of property to keep improving this plant. So I think it's fair to have you down on the books as owning a quarter interest in it."

"Quarter-interest— Just what're you talking about?"

"Gosh, Roger, I couldn't take an inheritance from your stepfather without cutting you in on it! After you'd been left just one measly buck."

"You confounded fool," I said. "I don't want you—"

"So you're down for a fourth of the profits."

"I wouldn't take a dime of—"

"But this station's going to make us rich, Roger!"

He said it as if he believed it. I looked around.

The room was furnished with the usual big desk and files and a stenographer's desk and telephones and so on. At the back, opening off of this room were smaller rooms—one was crowded with expensive-looking electrical equipment that was all panels with dials and lights and knobs and coils. I don't know the technical terms of the business. Next to it was a door leading into an announcer's booth, I guess—I could see a chair and a desk on which were more dials and push-buttons and a couple of mikes hanging from the ceiling, and two round disks—"turntables" I later learned they were called—on which to play records. This room had a far window looking out onto the sound stage. Just a small outfit, Station KRO, but it looked like a busy, competent place.

For the sound engineer was standing alert in front of his panels; a sound-effects man was bending over a turntable in the announcer's booth, while another man stood at the window there, watching a group of people busy on the sound stage.

I couldn't help but think that this radio business was just the sort to suit Mike. Its feverish activity, the tension of a split-second schedule and of knowing that a vast audience waited upon you, all had the dramatic quality of a fascinating game. And essentially, that's what life was for Mike. An engrossing game played for its own sake as well as for its rewards.

What was it Abraham Lincoln said? "*At its best, life is barely tolerable.*" Well, Lincoln was no Mike Norredge. And Mike was no Lincoln!

CHAPTER TWO



"By the way, Mike, seen Lucius lately?" I asked. Mike frowned, and sighed.

"People ought to be vaccinated against that guy," he said, as he reached for his pealing phone. "Hello? . . . Oh, yes, Mr. Will-ever." His tone grew hard. "Yes, I did refuse your account. Why? Because the Federal Trade Commission has condemned a shipment of your product. . . . No-o, I'm no bluenose, old-timer. I'm just trying to be a good business man. Why don't you follow suit?" And he jammed the receiver back onto the hook.

"Roger, I really do want you to look over the books—"

A commotion at the door to the outer office cut in on him. Two men came striding into the room, Izzy trailing them and spluttering objections.

"You can't come busting into a man's office, no matter who you are! Mike, these—"

"It's all right, Izzy," Mike said, waving him back. "Hello, M'Ginnlis. How're you, Rafferty?" He was very engaging of manner, Mike was; and he went to meet the two men with outstretched hand.

They didn't see his hand at all. M'Ginnlis was a squat, brawny-shouldered chap with a face flushed by high blood-pressure. Rafferty was just as heavy of brawn, but of towering height. M'Ginnlis started to talk; Rafferty hung back.

"Two months' back rent, and rent for one month in advance," M'Ginnlis said. "I want it now, Mr. Norredge. *Right now.*"

"Tomorrow. Y'see—"

"Then I get you an eviction notice!"

"But I've got sponsors waiting to hear a special program that'll make big money. Look, M'Ginnlis—"

"Once," said M'Ginnlis, "I bought mining stock. Oil stock, too. I've even sunk money into a machine to make gasoline out of corn-stalks. But a man's bound to wake up *sometime*! You got my money?"

"No, but—"

"Then you get an eviction notice! Come on, Tony."

Rafferty looked at us, screwed up his thick lips and spat a gob of tobacco juice at the wastebasket and followed his boss out of the room.

Izzy groaned.

"Mike, there's a man outside who's getting rich making plastic substitutes for building hardware. You just got to sell him radio time!"

"Never failed you yet, Izzy."

"No, but if you do this time, we'll be eating in midnight missions—singing hymns and confessing sins for a bowl of soup!"

"Hold him off till I can make up the twelve o'clock news-broadcast, Izzy," Mike ordered. "Roger, help me."

He was grabbing up a pile of items the stenographer had typed up, bringing them to his desk. We sat down and started fingering through the sheets of paper.

"Hello, Mike."

I didn't look up; I recognized the nice voice—it was the tall, shapely girl with the red-brown hair and the nice gray eyes who'd been sitting next to me in the waiting-room: the attractive young woman who was that *Prunella Prim* hag on the radio. Either Izzy had let her in, or she'd barged past him.

"*Daisymae!*"

Mike had let out a shout of surprise—and pleasure. I heard him jump from his chair and cross the room. I didn't look up. My gaze was glued to the news item in my fist.

"Gosh, it's swell to see you!" Mike was saying to her, his keen, live voice vibrant with pleasure. "It's been months—years. Here, sit down—let me feast my starved eyes on you!"

"It's been," Daisymae answered, "eleven months and one week, to be exact."

"This is an occasion! Say, I'm glad you're here! I—"

I didn't hear the rest of Mike's words; I was reading that news item.

POLICE HUNT DOCTOR IN KNIFE MURDER

The body of a young woman dressed only in a negligee was brought to St. Bartholomew's Hospital today by a man who gave his name as Dr. Roger Lathburn and his address as the Hotel Prentiss. The young woman had just died of a stab wound in the left side. Her identity has been established by newspaper reporters as that of Mrs. Lucius Mid-

leigh, the former Natalie Thorpe Westman, prominent young clubwoman of the city.

Hospital Superintendent Demorest reveals that the man calling himself Dr. Lathburn told a story of driving down Terrace Avenue and seeing a young woman staggering across the street. He stopped, found that she was seriously hurt, and rushed her to the hospital. As yet the Midleigh household has not been contacted for information. However, a neighbor, Mr. Ernest Bjornstedt, who was working in his garden across the street from the Midleigh residence all morning, says that he saw several cars entering and leaving the Midleigh grounds; he saw no one, neither Mrs. Midleigh nor anyone else, leave the Midleigh place on foot. He insists that Mrs. Midleigh did not stagger across the street, reeling from injuries.

Police, therefore, doubt the story told by the man who gave his name as Dr. Roger Lathburn, and are hunting for him for further questioning. Other members of the Midleigh family as yet have not been contacted.

"SO that young woman was Lucius' wife!" I realized. Lucius was here at the radio station now, in the front office. Either he did not know his wife was dead at all—or he had killed her! If he knew that she had been murdered, he wouldn't be waiting here just to see Mike. Not unless he himself had murdered her and was trying to hide his guilt.

Then I thought of the jam I was in.

I thought of that phone-call at my cousin's house, while I was looking around Lucius' kitchen—of the excited voice that had urged Lucius to humor me, to stall me off, not to be afraid, because the police were already rushing there to protect Lucius against me!

When that man who'd made the phone-call—whoever he was—told his story to the police, the case against me would be mighty black. It would look as if Lucius had been mortally afraid of me, as if I had come to the house deliberately to murder somebody. Why, the circumstantial case against me might put me in the gas chamber!

Mike was yelling for Izzy to bring Miss Cecily in, and meanwhile pushing a chair forward for Daisymae.

Izzy ushered in that lovely smartly-dressed blonde who looked so self-conscious. Mike strode forward to meet her, and took her hand to present her to Daisymae.

"Daisymae, I want you to meet Cecily—the girl I'm going to marry in a month."

Smiling, Daisymae said: "I'm the girl Mike's going to be divorced from in a month."

"Oh, how d'you do?" Cecily stammered, her long lashes fluttering, a little taken aback.

"Mike's lucky," said Daisymae.

"You're very sweet to say so."

"But for you, he's no bargain. Oh, as long as you flatter him and yes him, you'll get along fine. The rub'll come when you try to head him off from attempting to cure a corn by cutting off his foot. Mike's always sparking ideas, and he goes so wild with enthusiasm that he can't bear to be told that some of his brain children are Mongoloid idiots. Don't make any mistakes. You butter him up good with flattery, and steel yourself against brain-storms, or before you know it, you'll find yourself with a theme-song like this—'*But Mike, that just isn't done! Where's your sense of proportion?*'"

She was pouring it out, Daisymae. And I realized that these things she was telling Cecily had long lain hot and writhing in the deeps of Daisymae's mind. She still loved Mike—loved him all the more profoundly for having no illusions about him.

"Mike likes the clinging vine before marriage," she was telling Cecily. "But after marriage, if the clinging vine doesn't turn into a sequoia, he treats it like poison ivy."

"Look, you two," Mike butted in hastily. "I want you to meet my cousin Roger Lathburn, who's part owner of this station."

I said how d'you do. Cecily nodded grandly. Daisymae shook my hand, and her grip had warmth and firmness.

"How do you like radio, Mr. Lathburn?" Cecily asked. "Doesn't it give you a *thrill*, talking to an audience of millions?"

"No. I've been strictly a silent partner," I said. And so help me, it was unintentional!

"We'll all get a thrill," Mike put in, "when my new *Sensation Hour* series is broadcasting."

"You got something good, Mike?" Daisymae said.

"I sure have! I'm preparing a series of American programs that are as indigenous as 'Yankee Doodle,' as inspiring as Patrick Henry and as forward-looking as the Statue of Liberty!"

"Bet they make the Red Network turn green with envy."

Cecily said, "Enthusiasm like Mike's is the spirit of genius. With it, Mike can do anything."

"Bet he can't lay an egg," Daisymae murmured.

"Mike really has courage and vision."

"Sure. With his vision, all he needs to make money is a tin cup."

"You radio people joke a lot," Cecily said, slipping her arm through Mike's. And she sort of hung on him in a way that reeked of ownership. That was her come-back to Daisymae.

All Daisymae could do was look indifferently away and murmur: "Yeah, Mike's going to make a great splash!"

I had the feeling that Daisymae had won all the points—but Cecily had got the decision.

Cecily glanced at her platinum wrist-watch, and her great blue eyes widened in horror. "Oh, Michael, I'll be late for a fitting. I've got to rush." On tiptoe she gave him a quick kiss and patted his lean cheek. "By, all!"

Beaming, Mike gazed after her till the door closed behind her.

"Isn't she gorgeous, Daisymae? A man could be happy with a wife like that!"

"If he aint deaf, dumb, blind and got stringhalt," agreed Daisymae.

Mike laughed heartily, and said: "Gosh, honey, I'm just realizing how much I missed you. I still go home at night with a feeling of something nice and exciting about to happen."

"The old soft soap that talked me into marrying you."

"The old acid tongue that talked me into divorcing you."

But he was smiling as he shook his head in mock regret. He put a finger under her chin and tilted her lovely face up. Her gray eyes widened a trifle, and she caught a soft breath; but I saw the pulse throbbing in her throat, and saw her lips part; and I knew that she would melt into his arms. But he didn't draw her close, didn't kiss her.

Because I was in the room? Hastily I started for the door, feeling as welcome as a case of hives.

IN the outer office Lucius Midleigh was still trying to get past Izzy Baylon. The worry on Lucius' face was too deep-felt to be funny.

I said: "Izzy, Mr. Midleigh can come in now."

Lucius barged through the railing gate. The other people waiting on those deep-worn chairs sighed and shifted impatiently.

"Where's Mr. Norredge?" Lucius asked as I shut the door. Perspiration stood on his forehead, he was shaking.

I said: "Lucius, that's a hell of a way to greet a long-lost cousin."

For the first time he really looked at me, focused those bulging, darting eyes right on me.

"G-good God—it's *you*. Roger!"

He was pumping my hand then with thick, clammy fingers—but he didn't let go of that Gladstone bag with his other hand.

"I expected to have breakfast with you," I said.

"Breakfast?"

I realized that he had actually forgotten our date for this morning. Something had come up—something that jarred all thought of a date with me out of his mind.

"Mike's busy," I repeated. "Come in here for a minute."

I pushed him on down the corridor into a small back room. The shades were drawn, and I switched on a light. The room had couches and a low wide table with magazines and cigarettes, and was evidently used as a lounge between broadcasts.

"Sit down, Lucius. I've got to tell you a couple things." I was thinking that Lucius did not know that his wife had been murdered—if his present actions were not pretense. "Before you left home this morning, to come here, did you phone a friend that you expected me for breakfast?"

"Why, no. To tell you the truth," he said miserably, "I was in such a rush that I forgot about you." He stood up. "Roger, I've got to talk to Mike. We can—"

"Was your wife," I cut in, "feeling well when you left home, Lucius?"

"Yes. Of course. She's always well."

My back was to the door. I didn't see it open or hear anything until, all of a sudden, the light-switch clicked sharply and the room was almost pitch dark again.

A sharp whisper said: "Sit still."

A flashlight threw a beam onto our faces—a small light, like a fountain-pen flash. And there at the door we saw a hand move into the beam of light, a hand clutching an automatic pistol. The man behind it we could not see, for the glare in our eyes and also because he had crouched back of the partly open door.

"Midleigh, you've got a car outside. Get into it. Head for San Diego. Go fast, but don't get picked up for speeding. Cross the border into Mexico. Don't let anybody know where you are. *Understand?*"

"Y-yes sir!"

As I've said before, I get mad easy. Jumping to my feet, I barged out. "Who the hell are you to—"

But I crashed right back onto my chair again, Lucius pulled me down so hard, begging: "Roger, don't—for God's sake!"

Abruptly the flashlight was clicked off, and the door shut.

I sprang at the door, whipped it open and started to follow—

But the guy was waiting for me. His gun-barrel caught me alongside the temple, and I hit the floor in a terrific sprawl. I didn't feel it, though. We medical men still don't have an anesthetic that gives as swift oblivion as the good, hearty smack of a gun-barrel or a ball bat. . . .

I was lying on a couch in that room when I came to. Lucius was rubbing my wrists ineffectually and making well-meaning but helpless sounds, asking me if I'd like a drink, but not fetching one.

"Did you chase that man? Course you didn't," I said, sitting up and groaning as my temple throbbed with pain. "How long've I been out?"

"Couple of minutes, that's all. Gosh, Roger!"

"Did you recognize that man's voice?"

"No, I didn't. I s-swear I didn't, Roger!"

He was too vehement about it. He was lying.

"Why in blazes should anybody poke a gun at you and tell you to get out of the country, Lucius?"

"Gosh, Roger, I don't know! It's just as screwy to me as it is to you!"

But his eyes wouldn't meet my glance as he said it. I decided to see if I could shock him into revealing something.

"Lucius, when I left your house this morning, your wife wasn't well."

He stiffened. His eyes stared at me, steady and intent; his big body quit its nervous, sweating shaking.

"What the hell are you talking about?" he demanded hollowly.

He did not know that his wife had been murdered. And, I realized, he could not stand the news of his wife's death told him without preparation. It would be too great a shock.

"She had an accident in the kitchen. Slipped, and—cut herself rather badly with a knife."

"You took care of her?" He gasped it out, and grabbed hold of my elbows. I felt a rise of respect for him. Fat and neurasthenic and phony as he was, evidently his love for his wife was real and deep.

"Yes, I took her to a hospital—"

"Then she's all right." He let out a shaky sigh of relief. "Roger, I've just got to see Mike! Right away."

"You going," I asked, "to skip south across the border?"

"Not yet," he answered; then tried to cover up. "I m-mean, I don't know what I'll do, Roger!"

So that guy with the gun had something on him. . . .

"You wait here," I said. "I'll see if Mike is free to talk to you."

CHAPTER THREE



COULDN'T help but wonder as I walked out to the front office. That gunman held a club over Lucius' head, obviously. But what sort of club?

It was hard to imagine Lucius in the rôle of a transgressor against society. Of this much I felt sure: If Lucius was in any sort of trouble, somebody with force of character and wily brains was behind him, pushing.

Izzy Baylon was not at the desk in the front office. And of the people who'd been waiting, only four were left.

I asked: "Did anybody leave here within the last few minutes?"

Will Randley shook his head. "No."

The others just looked at me, glumly indifferent.

I started back to Mike's office, wondering what to do next.

Mike was still talking to Daisymae. Izzy was there too, wringing his hands.

"Mikel!" Izzy pleaded. "That man from the Apex-Du-Art Agency is out front with a customer. You got to see 'em! They're biting their nails and building up sales-resistance!"

"Send 'em in, Izzy," Daisymae said, moving away from Mike. "I'll talk to Roger awhile, Mike."

"Sit at the far desk!" Mike said. "Busier we look, the better. Okay, Izzy! Send 'em in!"

Daisymae and I sat down at the far desk. I liked that. The light struck bronzy sparkles in her red-brown hair. The line of her throat was sweet and young. There was pride and grace in the way she carried herself.

Izzy ushered two men into the office. The short, dapper person was obviously an agency customer's man; he was all affability and high pressure. His name was Jones—J. Malcolm Jones. He introduced his client with a flourish. Mr. Ben Surgent was big and slouchy in an expensive way. His tan tweeds must have come from London, and his tan brogans looked sturdy enough to kick a hole in a tank. His face and hair were part of the ensemble—his hair was an indeterminate sandy-red, and his hollow-cheeked face was thick with pale freckles. His eyes were pale blue and his mustache was pale auburn, practically straw-colored. I decided that a lot of recessive traits in his genes must've come to the fore.

But he had plenty of dominant characteristics too. Ever notice the vibration in a room when you turn a radio too loud? Mr. Ben Surgent spoke, and his voice was a deep rumble that started down near those heavy brogans and swelled out in a vibration like a tame earthquake.

He didn't wait for the agency man to explain his business.

"Mr. Norredge, I'm a manufacturer. I make plastics, and war conditions open a vast potential market for my products."

"As you know," the agency man put in, "aluminum and copper and manganese are now limited to Defense purposes—"

"And now that metals such as aluminum and manganese are no longer obtainable," Mr. Ben Surgent went right on as if the agency man hadn't opened his mouth at all, "my plastic substitutes for metal products will fill a vital and increasing need."

"If people find out that plastic substitutes are *available!*" the agency man squeaked in.

"For instance, the agitator in your washing machine: when there is no more metal available to make it, I can supply such agitators out of durable plastic. Timing gears. Cases for clocks, radios, and X-ray machines. Even doorknobs, coffee tables. *But—*" Mr. Ben Surgent leaned forward and tapped Mike's chest with a forefinger. "People have got to *know* there's a plastic substitute for almost every metal need. *They've got to know!*"

"And radio will let the world know," Mike got out. "Mr. Surgent, you've come to the right place—"

"*Have I!*" Surgent grated it out in a harsh grunt that shouted skepticism and indifference. A hard man to sell, Mr. Surgent.

Mike didn't fluster; Mike didn't back water. He said simply: "I have for sale a program that will draw tops in Crossley ratings. That's what you want. You want to reach the widest section of the public possible."

"I do," Mr. Ben Surgent snapped. "Norredge, I didn't have to come to this dinky two-by-four station." He was leaning forward now, punctuating every word with a jab of a finger with a big yellow diamond on it. "I could've gone to Station KFVB, or KNX or KECA. But I want the six P.M. spot for my program. The dinner-hour. And every big station has got that time already contracted for. You haven't."

"Not yet," Mike said coolly. "But tomorrow at six P.M. I'm starting a surprise program that will be tops in dramatic entertainment. Big accounts will compete for that show."

"I want your six P.M. spot," Surgent said, punctuating with that finger again. "And I want it *cheap!*"

At that, Mike did something that won my respect.

He smiled. "You won't get my program cheap. It'll be expensive. Damned expensive—and worth every dime of it." He stood up and held out his hand. "Nice to have met you, Mr. Surgent."

The agency man gulped in consternation and started to try to smooth things over—but Mr. Ben Surgent stopped that by standing up and turning on his heel and leaving without even a shake of the hand. My heart sank. Mike's confident smile sort of wilted at the edges.

But at the door, Mr. Ben Surgent stopped and turned. "Norredge, tomorrow at six I'll be listening. If your program's any good, I'll pay your price just because I need that six P.M. spot. But if your program's lousy—"

"Sensation Hour" will be tops in radio," said Mike.

"Yeah?" doubted Surgent.

I wasn't looking as Mr. Ben Surgent and the dapper little agency man left, and I wasn't listening as Izzy asked Mike how things had gone. Because I was staring into Daisymae's purse. She had opened it to take out a compact and glance at herself in its mirror. The purse came open as she put it down there on the desk between us. I could see into it.

And clustered there within the purse I saw a long, broken strand of pearls. Like bunched milky grapes they were scattered there in the purse. . . . And some of the lustrous creamy orient of those pearls was marred by a blotching of sullen, ominous crimson.

I sat there rigid, my hands white-knuckled on the arms of my chair. I couldn't believe it. My brain simply refused to accept the fact that Daisymae Laurens was in any way involved with the murder of the dark-haired young woman who had died in my car—

Mike was wild with optimism.

"Gang, 'Sensation Hour' is going over with a bang! All we have to do is put on one decent broadcast tomorrow night, and we're all set. Mr. Ben Surgent is going to pay us three grand a week for a show that's going to be ether dynamite!"

I stood up and sort of drifted out of there like a somnambulist. It shows how Daisymae had got to me. That suspicion of her could so stagger me. After all, I'd just met her this morning!

The corridor was dark, and the man walking toward me seemed to loom and fill it, he was so broad and big. His feet made no sound on the deep-piled carpet—I guess that was what made me start so violently. Actually, I had an instant of real fright.

"Mr. Norredge?" he said.

"No. Mr. Norredge is busy."

"That's all right." The man had a loud, cheery voice that was reassuring as warm sunshine pouring through California fog. "I waited a while out front, but nobody came to the desk and the inner door was open, so I just walked in."

"If you'll wait—"

"No hurry. You just let Mr. Norredge know I was here. He can call me at his leisure. Nolane's my name. Terence Nolane. I'm at the Federal Building."

"F-Federal Building?" I repeated.

"Yes. Local office of the Treasury Department," he said in that amiable offhand way that was so reassuring. I gawked at him.

"Tell Mr. Norredge to call me just any time. I'm sure we can straighten matters out in a hurry." And with an affable wave of his big hand he went out the door to the front office and on out of the building.

I stood there, rubbing my chin.

Local office of the Treasury Department!

What in the world could they want with Mike?

CHAPTER FOUR



URNING, I started back to Mike's office. Ahead of me, I saw Lucius opening the door. "Mike! I've got to see you," I heard him say. "Sorry, but I'm busy."

"Mike, you've got to let me talk to you in private!"

"Damn it, Lucius, I've got no use for you, and I know you've got none for me."

"Mike, this is too damn' important for kid stuff," Lucius insisted. "There's too much money involved."

"Money?" blurted Izzy. "Mike, talk to the guy!"

"I'm too busy. Tomorrow, Lucius—"

A loud-speaker had been chattering very softly from the wall. It was controlled from Mike's desk, and it piped into the room whatever was being broadcast from Station KRO.

All of a sudden that loud-speaker became silent. And though it had been turned on low, and had been just an unheeded whisper behind all the argument in the room, now that it was suddenly mute, it was appallingly conspicuous.

Mike jerked around to look at his desk.

"Who turned that speaker off?"

"Nobody, Mike," Daisymae said worriedly.

"Good Lord, they haven't quit broadcasting?" Mike muttered, and turned to look through the window at the rear, which looked out onto the sound stage. We all turned too.

Five actors in there had been putting on some serial or other: I remembered it was about a farm family whose daughter had come home with a big car and furs and jewels, only it turned out her real job in the city was as an upstairs maid. Anyway, those five actors were not grouped around the mike on the stage, holding scripts in their hands and acting their rôles. No, the bunch of them were walking away from the mike, toward the door into the corridor leading to this office.

"They have quit," Daisymae gasped. "Right in the middle—"

And then the door to the control-room opened, and the engineer left his panel dials to come striding into the room in a way so grim and quiet it made my pulse skip a beat. Out of the announcer's booth came the sound-effects man. And as the acting company entered from the corridor, even Mike's stenographer got up from her battered machine. They all converged toward Mike's desk.

I'll say this for Mike—he didn't wait like a sitting rabbit for trouble to hit him, but jumped to meet it.

Smiling, his pleasant voice alive with optimism, he burst out: "Gang, we got a big money sponsor all set to back 'Sensation Hour'!"

"You got checks for our back pay ready?"

"Tomorrow night, fellows! Once we've broadcast—"

"It's no use, Mr. Norredge."

"We've waited and waited—"

"And now *we quit*."

"But you can't all walk out on me like this!"

"Watch us."

"You'll get your pay!"

"Not if the show's a flop."

"But I give you my word—"

"You've given us your word for weeks."

Mike was gesticulating by now, "'Sensation Hour' will be a smash hit! Stick on the job, and inside of three months you'll be rating full-page photos in *Vanity Fair*—"

"You mean two-line epitaphs in *Variety*!"

That was a good exit line, and the acting company took it like a curtain. Out they went.

"Mike," I blurted, "quitting you on such short notice—can't you report them to Equity or something?"

"Lord, no! They could report *me*," he groaned. "They've been damned decent, waiting for their pay. I can't blame 'em."

It was Daisymae, good trouper that she is, who reminded him: "Mike! You're off the air!"

"Good God! Izzy—records!" Mike ordered, dashing for the announcer's booth. Inside, he slid into the chair in front of the mike on the long table and, his voice cultivated and mellifluous, he said: "Friends, due to unforeseen circumstances it is necessary to terminate 'Prodigal Daughter' at this point. We will continue, now, with recordings of classical music."

And from the loud-speaker in the office came that familiar, reassuring undertone. Station KRO was on the air again.

"But Mike can't stretch a Good Music hour into an all-day schedule!" Daisymae exclaimed.

THEN the outer door opened and two men barged into the room, a wide little man followed by a wide big man, like a shadow. I've always said that the greatest ironic dramatist of them all is Old Lady Luck. So of course it would be Mike's landlord who'd come in on us now—M'Ginnlis, and that tobacco-chewing lout Rafforty.

M'Ginnlis was brandishing a legal-looking paper.

And as Mike came out of that announcer's booth, M'Ginnlis yawned: "I told you I'd get an eviction notice, and here it is!"

Mike winced painfully, but covered up quick.

"Why, thanks, M'Ginnlis! Swell of you to let us out of our lease. Now we can move to bigger quarters. Did you

know we've got the Surgent Plastics Corporation's account?"

M'Ginnlis' jaw dropped. Then he sneered:

"And what do they use for money? *Beer labels?*"

He turned on his heel. And that big lout Rafforty lumbered after his boss like a tank following a jeep.

Mike flushed red. Izzy groaned.

Cousin Lucius had been lurking in the background during the interruptions, like a case of smallpox looking for a chance to break out. Now he headed for Mike.

"I've waited long as I can! Mike, you *got* to hear—"

Mike didn't even look at him.

"Izzy, get Will Randley in here! He's one of the best medicine-show spielers that ever hit the Bible Belt. We can use 'im!"

Daisymae asked: "What're you going to do, Mike?"

"'Sensation Hour' is going on!"

I asked: "Where'll you get actors?"

"I'll get 'em, all right!"

"Sure," Daisymae said. "Mike's a genius—he can put two tomcats in a gunnysack and pull out twelve kittens!"

"Aw, what's the use?" Izzy groaned. "We're licked."

"Keep your chin up. You've had failures before."

"Sure. Made a good living at 'em," Izzy moaned. "But what good is a fire in a radio station?"

"We'll get money somewhere."

"Mike, I've got money here," Lucius Midleigh said, stepping into Mike's way with that Gladstone bag of his.

"You m-mean, in that bag?" Izzy blurted.

"Money?" Mike repeated. "What money?"

"From the estate," Lucius said.

"But that aint possible! The estate was divided up."

"Not all of it. Give me a chair, will you? My feet are torturin' me, and—"

"Damn it, explain!" Mike rasped at him.

And Izzy demanded: "How much dough is there?"

"Mike, your share'll run something over a hundred thousand."

Izzy uttered a low whistle, and his eyes suddenly shone.

And Mike breathed: "Over a hundred thousand dollars! But where's it come from? Lucius, if this is a gag—"

"The money's from the estate, I tell you! Mike," Lucius pleaded, "come into another room so we can talk."

"You can talk right here!"

Lucius darted a panicky look around. At me, mostly, I thought.

"Mike, I was appointed executor of the estate," he said.

"You know that. Well, I was given a key to a safe-deposit box, and certain instructions. You know what a suspicious, crotchety old guy Uncle Jerry was, and—well, you know how bitter and—vindictive he was toward Roger, here. He wasn't content to just cut Roger out of the estate with only a dollar. He wanted to rub it in. He wanted to make Roger feel sick about it. So my instructions were to keep this money intact. To put it out at interest until Roger came home. Then this cash left in the safe-deposit box was to be divided between you and me, Mike. Roger was to know about it, but not to get a cent of it. It isn't exactly pretty, but that's how Uncle Jerry left it. Uncle Jerry wanted it to be a—a—"

"A kick in the teeth for Roger," Mike snapped. "Like hell! Half of any dough I get is Roger's!"

I said: "Thanks, Mike. But I don't need it. Honest, all I'm thinking right now is what a swell break this is for you and Lucius."

"It is a break," Mike admitted, his eyes shining. "It's manna from heaven! We've got dough. Daisymae, we've got dough!"

Izzy put an arm about Lucius' thick shoulders and demanded in a taut whisper: "You've brought some of the money with you?"

"About fourteen thousand in this bag."

Izzy let out a whoop. "You're an angel, Lucius!"

Mike said: "Izzy, we got to get on the phones! I'll call M'Ginnlis. We can pay his damned rent. You call Melvin. And Judy Prentiss. I'll reach De Lacy at his club. We got to get them back to rehearse. Lord, we're all set now! Lucius, you're a life-saver. You're a Good Samaritan!"

Mike and Izzy had rushed to the two phones on the stenog's desk and were dialing like mad.

I didn't exactly share their wild relief. I had misgivings; I thought Lucius should be looking a lot happier than he seemed.

"Hello, M'Ginnlis?" Mike was saying into the phone then.

And Izzy was yelling: "Melvin, come home. All is forgiven. Sure, you'll get your back pay. We got an angel! With dough."

"Hey, stop!" Lucius shouted. "Stop! Listen to me!"

"Mr. De Lacy, please," Mike said.

"Stop!" Lucius screamed. On Mike's desk was a big chromium desk-lamp. Lucius shoved it crashing to the floor. And in the appalled silence that followed, he said: "Listen to me before you cut your own throats!"

He was frightening, almost beside himself.

Daisymae moved closer to Mike. I took a stride toward Lucius; we might have to jump him.

But Mike, almost gently, asked: "What's wrong, Lucius?"

"Don't tell M'Ginnlis you can pay your rent, and don't call your actors back—"

"But why not?" Izzy rasped. "Mike can pay 'em!"

"But you can't s-spend this money I've brought!"

Mike put down the phone he was holding, his lean face very disturbed. "Look, is this money hot or something?"

"My pockets are lined with asbestos!" Izzy said stubbornly.

"It aint stolen," Lucius groaned, "but—"

Anger flared in Mike. "Damn you, explain this!"

Lucius didn't explain; Lucius sat in a chair as if turned rigid by a cataleptic stroke. He was staring past me and Mike, at the door to the corridor. Daisymae looked back, and exclaimed in surprise. I turned my head.

AN apologetic beginning of a smile on his big face, a man stood there, a big brawny man who somehow seemed poised and light on his feet, who seemed affable and offhand and yet wary all at once. Abruptly I remembered him.

"My name is Nolane," he said, coming into the room. He took off his hat, and showed hair as yellow and silky as a girl's; and as his smile broadened, he showed teeth so jammed and crooked and tobacco-stained that in spite of his smooth shave and well-pressed suit and slicked-back hair he seemed unkempt, careless of person. "Terence Nolane. Is Mr. Norredge here?"

"I'm Norredge," Mike said shortly.

"Instead of waiting for you to call me, Mr. Norredge, I decided to run in on you for a minute, on account of I have to leave the office for a while."

"Why should I want to call you?" Mike demanded.

"I'm from the local office of the Treasury Department," Nolane said, and paused a moment, as if that should explain his business to Mike. But Mike continued to look blank.

"What's your business with me?" Mike asked.

"You're one of the two heirs of Jerrold Midleigh?"

"That's right."

Mike had become suddenly uneasy; Daisymae had caught a sharp breath. Involuntarily I myself had stiffened.

"It's just a matter of straightening out some records, Mr. Norredge. Nothing to cause you concern. Y'see, our Department has been tracing some gold payments made to the account of Jerrold Midleigh a number of years ago. We've lost track of the gold. Do you happen to know anything about it?"

Mike swallowed hard, then said: "Why, no—I mean, I'd never heard about this gold until practically just now."

Nolane asked thoughtfully: "You don't figure the old man might've shipped that gold out of the country?"

"I'm pretty confident he didn't."

"So am I, to tell you the truth. Well, guess I'm barking up the wrong tree, here," Nolane said with that affable, reassuring casualness. "By the way, you're acquainted with the gold laws, aren't you? To hoard gold, is a crime punishable with a minimum of six months in prison and a fine of double the value of the gold."

"Is th-that so?"

"Uh-huh. Sometimes, in flagrant cases, the Department gets het up and will push a mean charge of conspiracy against you, and a judge will put you in the penitentiary for a good stiff jolt." Somehow, Nolane wasn't offhand and affable now.

Daisymae's hand went out to Mike's arm. I looked at Lucius. His lips were white, and I could almost feel the cringing in him.

"And," went on Nolane, "in cases where you try to pass the gold as legal tender, we pin fraud charges onto you, as well. You can't gyp Uncle Sam with impunity. No, sir!"

"I—wouldn't want to even try," Mike said.

"Well, I'll drop around later in the day," Nolane said. "Meanwhile, if you'd look into such letters and records of old Mr. Midleigh's that might be in your possession, I'd sure appreciate it. You never can tell what trifle can put you on the right track in this business."

With an affable wave of the hand he turned and stalked out.

We looked at Lucius. Mike and Izzy and Daisymae and I—we looked at Lucius, and Lucius cringed in his chair.

Mike said, his voice a harsh whisper: "This two hundred grand we inherit, Lucius—and his money in your satchel—it's all—" He couldn't bring himself to say it.

Lucius nodded miserably.

"Yeah. It's all gold coin."

Daisymae, with a stricken, "I *knew* it was too good to be true!" dropped into a chair.

"But why?" Mike rapped out like a slap across the face. "Why? Why should Uncle Jerry have turned his money into gold?"

Lucius shrugged. "He hated the New Deal. He was all set to grab his coin and sail for England."

"When did you first look into that safe-deposit box?"

"Soon after I was made executor of the estate," Lucius admitted; and he looked awfully sick.

Daisymae said: "Even if that money is gold, it's still money. Just turn it into the Government and explain how you got it."

MIKE straightened his bowed shoulders. Gloom passed from his lean, keen face as if wiped off with a towel.

"Of course. Of course! That's all we got to do—just hand it over to the Treasury and get two-hundred-and-twenty grand in folding money for it! Buck up, Lucius!"

"No," said Lucius. "We can't hand it over to the Treasury."

"And why the hell not?" Izzy demanded.

"They'll ask questions." Lucius was mouthing his words out as if his vocal cords were in a cramp. "They'll ask why I didn't turn the gold coin in as soon as I got charge of it."

"Good Lord!" I gasped. "You've been *hoarding* that gold!"

And Lucius nodded, too anguished to speak.

"Why in God's name did you do *that*?" Mike demanded.

Lucius tried to speak; swallowed hard, and tried again. "Y'see, I—I figured maybe Uncle Jerry was right—"

"You mean," Daisymae snapped, "you thought you might just grab that coin all for yourself?"

"B-but I didn't intend to cheat you, Mike! Honest!"
Mike just looked at him.
Izzy grated: "And I was going to call you a skunk. I apologize. To the skunk!"

"You blamed fool, Lucius," Mike said.
"Well, Mike?" Izzy said, his raucous voice shrill-edged.
"You aint going to be this mug's accomplice, are you?"
"Call Mr. Nolane," Daisymae put in. "Tell him that the gold has been located and you're turning it over to the Treasury. That's the only sane thing to do. You'll get legal tender for it!"

Mike shook his head. "No."
"What d'you mean, no?" Izzy demanded.
"Oh, hell, Izzy! Lucius is my cousin."
Daisymae said: "You're being quixotic, Mike."
Mike's lean face tightened stubbornly.
Just as stubbornly Izzy reminded: "It's costin' you over a hundred grand not to throw Lucius to the wolves! Just when you need the dough so damn' bad, too."

It was quixotic of Mike. But I understood how he felt.
Daisymae threw up her hands.
"It's so horribly tantalizing!"

"It does make me feel kind of sick," Mike mumbled.
Izzy said: "Makes *me* feel like a guy who's stumbled into a nudist colony—and got a cinder in both eyes!"

Lucius looked pleadingly at Mike.
"So what'll I do, Mike?" he asked. "That Treasury man, Nolane—he's traced that gold. He'll find it in my possession."

"How do I know what you should do?"
Lucius cringed at Mike's tone. Lucius looked stricken.
It broke Mike down. He said impulsively: "Oh, hell, guy, buck up. We'll figure a way out for you."

"Mike!" Izzy yelled then. "We've phoned the actors to come back to work—and now we got no dough!"

Mike whirled toward the telephones.
"We got to head 'em off, Izzy!"

And then they were dialing frantically, and Mike was saying: "Never mind coming for your rent, M'Ginnlis. We're moving!" And Izzy was telling Melvin: "We're dickerin' with Orson Welles for your rôle—"

And me, I was staring at Lucius, thinking, *thinking*—
I had an overpowering feeling that Lucius had lied to us. From start to finish, he had been putting something over. Something that was, to judge from his anguished dithering about it, of crucial, perhaps tragic, importance to him and to us.

CHAPTER FIVE



DECIDED to test Lucius. To probe under his lies. But first I went into the outer office and phoned the hospital where I had taken Natalie Midleigh, and told them how to reach Lucius. Then I walked back into the inner office.

Mike was in the announcer's booth. Izzy and Will Randley and Daisymae were going over a script. Lucius was slumped into an armchair, that inhalator rammed into a nostril, breathing in a gust of benzedrine. I winced, and wondered if his sinus were lined with calluses.

I sat down beside and said: "Lucius, this morning, before you left home, did you telephone a friend that you were expecting me?"

"Why, no. If I'd thought at all, Roger, I wouldn't have rushed out on you like I did. I was too upset."

The phone pealed. I picked it up, then handed it to Lucius. "For you. St. Bartholomew's."

Blood drained from his fleshy face.

His thick fingers shook, and his voice quavered as he took the phone and said: "H-hello? . . . This is he." He listened a moment and seemed to slump with shock. "Is—is she dying?" he asked. Then: "I'll be right over."

He hung up, needing two tries at it.

"Roger, they won't tell me. Said I got to go there and talk to the physician."

You can't hate or belittle a man who's showing heart-break. I put my hand under his elbow.

"I'll go with you, Lucius."

He looked so grateful that I felt a pang.

We got into my car, and I drove to St. Bartholomew's.

We walked in. Lucius asked to see Mrs. Midleigh and I was steeling myself to keep sympathy from blunting my perceptiveness in studying Lucius as he saw his murdered wife—when two burly men, lounging near the front office counter, started toward us. I realized instantly that they were plain-clothes men. And just as swiftly I knew that now we were caught.

I swore at myself. I should have known that cops would be waiting here for Lucius to turn up!

"Mr. Midleigh, I'm Detective Lieutenant Garcia. Captain Michaelford would like to talk to you. Mind coming with us?"

He was offhand and polite, but hard-eyed about it.

"I've g-got to see my wife!" Lucius croaked.

"Sure. We'll wait." Garcia told his partner, "You go with Mr. Midleigh. I'll wait here." He was attaching himself to me, I realized. He asked: "Are you Dr. Lathburn?"

I said, "Yes." Things looked suspicious enough against me without adding to them by lying.

We waited. After a while Lucius came back, dragging his toed-in feet and looked dazed. The two plain-clothes men ushered us into a squad car and took us to the police station.

They took Lucius in first to talk to Michaelford. On the office window was painted "*Homicide Bureau*."

After a while they brought Lucius out.

"Captain Michaelford will see you now, Dr. Lathburn."

I went in. Michaelford was a heavy man with a gray mustache and a caved-in nose that made him look like a pugilist grown fat with middle age. He sized me up, his dark eyes keen under heavy brows, and decided to be frank and polite.

"Well, Lathburn, tell me the whole thing."

I told him, omitting a couple of details that had me worried most. When I finished, he made a steeple of his fingers, tucked in his lips and considered.

He said: "You told the hospital people that you found Mrs. Midleigh staggering in the street. You lied. Why?"

"Oh, just panicky impulse. Afraid I'd be involved."

He didn't believe it. But all he said was: "How long've you known Mrs. Midleigh?"

"Never saw her before in all my life. I've been gone for nine years. Lucius married her six or seven years ago."

Captain Michaelford's lips tightened. He opened a desk drawer and took out some snapshots and shoved them toward me.

"Never saw her before in all your life, huh?"

His tone stung—and scared me. My pulse skipped a beat, and my fingers had a tremor in them as I reached for the pictures.

The snapshots showed two people on board a ship, standing with their backs to the rail: a man and woman, and the man had his arm about the woman's waist, and she was smiling. It was all very carefree and cozy and nice. The woman was Mrs. Midleigh—Lucius' Natalie. And the man was—myself.

I guess my jaw dropped and my eyes bugged out. I was thunderstruck . . . Three years ago. That's when it had been. On board the *President Washington*. Natalie Thorpe, she had called herself. Miss Natalie Thorpe. She had been wearing her dark hair up in that hair-do which had been new then. Swept up into artful little curls that gave her face a doll-like piquancy. She had been a lot of fun. And it had been a rapid shipboard flirtation. And then abruptly, she'd broken it off. I

hadn't even seen her leave the ship. I'd felt hurt and mad at being dropped like that.

I said: "Captain, I didn't recognize her this morning. It's been three years, and she'd worn her hair differently, and it was way off on a cruise, and—well, I just didn't expect my cousin's wife to be the Miss Thorpe I'd met on a ship so long ago and known for such a short time!"

"Three years ago," he said. "And she'd been married to Midleigh seven years ago."

MY viscera tightened and grew cold. He was right—she had been married when I met her on the ship! But she had told me that she was Miss Thorpe. Why? . . . She had sought me out, deliberately played up to me. And just as deliberately brought our shipboard friendship to a dead end. . . . It looked as if she had sought me out for some purpose. And having achieved that purpose, was through with me!

I said: "Captain, I didn't know she was my cousin's wife. She told me that she was a Miss Thorpe."

"Why'd she tell you that?"

"I just don't know!"

"A suspicious prosecutor could say that you and Mrs. Midleigh had had a fling together on shipboard, three years ago. That you came back today and demanded that she leave her husband and go off with you. And when she refused, you stabbed her!"

"That's not so! That's not so, I tell you!"

He said: "We found these snapshots lying on Mrs. Midleigh's dressing-table—as if somebody had carefully put them there for us to find. Of course, it could have been sheer accident, too." He frowned. "If I wanted to, I could hold you. You're the only good suspect we've got. But I think I'll let you go. For the time being. Of course, you won't move from your present hotel."

It was a warning. I realized that I was being released only so that I might do something to incriminate myself. Captain Michaelford didn't have as much on me as he wanted to have, to make a case. Not yet, he hadn't.

A couple of things I had *not* told Captain Michaelford. Maybe I'd been foolish to hold out, I reflected as I left the police station; maybe I was risking my own neck.

I hadn't mentioned that baffling telephone call I'd received in Lucius' kitchen. And I hadn't told Captain Michaelford that, when I found lovely Mrs. Midleigh sitting in my car, mortally wounded, she had had a gun in her hand. A small, fancy automatic. And she had ordered me to drive her to Mike Norredge's radio station. Thinking back on it now, I remembered how firm she had been, in spite of her hurt. Determined. Vengefully determined.

Why hadn't I told Captain Michaelford about this?

Because of those pearls I'd seen in Miss Laurens' purse.

Pearls, some of them stained like the pearls I'd seen scattered on the floor of Natalie Midleigh's kitchen.

"It looks as if Miss Laurens was at Lucius' house this morning," I reasoned. "As if she'd had a quarrel with Natalie Midleigh. As if Daisymae stabbed Natalie. In the fracas, Natalie broke the string of pearls Daisymae was wearing. Or did she snatch the pearls from Natalie after stabbing her? Then Daisymae left. Natalie got a gun. Natalie knew that Daisymae was going to Mike's broadcasting studio. So Natalie started there—with a gun in her hand."

I hadn't told these things to Michaelford because they tended to incriminate Daisymae Laurens. I couldn't bring myself to do that. Why? Let's face it. Because of the way the sun shone in bronzy sparkles in her hair. Because of the fine proud lift of her head, and the way she laughed, and the direct look of her gray eyes. Of course, if it came to a showdown, and became definitely a matter of my neck or hers—oh, hell, it's adult infantilism to agonize over hypothetical possibilities. Or is it?

I looked for Lucius out in front of the police station. He wasn't around. I realized that he must have gone

on. My car was at the hospital, so I walked over to a taxi at the curb and gave the driver the address of Mike's studio.

He nodded, and swung onto the river road into town. There was little traffic, and what there was moved fast. I sat back and tried to think, and didn't bother to look behind.

There was some construction work being done on the road ahead, and traffic was swung about onto a temporary road alongside the river channel. Because of bad floods in previous years, the river bed had been revamped into a huge concrete flume, with steeply sloping sides.

Well, we were bowling along, closer to fifty than the forty-five-mile limit. A car came up alongside, fast—so swiftly that it all happened before I thought to turn and look. That car sideswiped us. Metal screamed, and a tire banged out like a cannon. I yelled, stiffening onto my feet, as the taxi lurched and swung, as the sky swooped down and the river-bed swung up like a wall and went clear over on top of us and down again and around again as the taxi rolled down that channel wall and hit the bottom with a rending crash. For me everything blacked out suddenly.

I was fighting for breath, choking with my face in water, when I next knew anything.

I scrambled to my knees, blinking and gasping. The taxi was on its side, in a foot of slow-moving water. I was both scared and mad, and I climbed out of the wreckage in a panicky hurry, swearing and not even realizing at first that I was swearing. The hackie was slumped in front. He was limp, senseless, as I hauled him out. Looking inside his shirt, I guessed that he had ribs and a collarbone broken.

I got him out of the water, but the concrete bank was too steep for me to haul him up onto the roadway without help. On hands and knees I managed to climb the wall, and stood up and looked around. With a choky, helpless feeling I realized that the accident hadn't been noticed at all, the traffic had been so wide-spaced at the time. Cars were going right on past now.

"So the guy who hit us didn't even stop!" I thought bitterly.

I was wrong. Up ahead I saw cars beginning to stop. I saw people jumping out and going to the embankment edge to stare down into the channel. Looking at the roadway, then, I saw the blank streaks of tires that had left their imprints as locked wheels skidded and slid in a wild zigzag, as a driver tried desperately to straighten out a hurtling car. I saw a guard-post, a hundred yards ahead, snapped off.

And running to the road edge, I saw that car which had hit us down in the river channel, lying upside-down.

"So he went off the road, too!" I realized. "Damn him!"

I slid down the embankment, several men following my lead. We reached the wrecked sedan—a black sedan it was—and saw a man in it.

"Help me get him out!" I said.

We hauled the man from the car and up onto the roadway. But he didn't need our help. I bent over him. The man was young, in his early twenties. He was a Filipino, apparently. I looked into his pockets, for identification, and found a driver's license. The name on the license was Hilarion Tongko. *And his address was the same as Lucius Midleigh's.*

THERE were a lot of questions I could ask, I thought bitterly as I stared at the neat, small figure. But I'd get no answer. Hilarion Tongko was dead; his head was smashed just as the hood and front of the car were smashed . . . I climbed back down to the car. I looked at the registration-slip on the steering-wheel. The name of the owner of that car was *Lucius Midleigh*.

A police car stopped up on the roadway, and presently an ambulance from the emergency hospital arrived. The

taxi-driver was moaning with pain now. He and the dead Filipino were loaded into the ambulance. The interne and cops insisted I go with the ambulance to the hospital for a looking-over.

At the hospital Captain Michaelford came striding in to see me.

I told how the accident had happened.

"You've got no reason to suspect that it *wasn't* an accident, have you?" he asked.

I had. Good reason, too. But I evaded answering.

"What else could it've been?" I snapped at him. "Lord, the way my head feels, I got a concussion."

So he didn't bother me long. And I kept my bitter, frantic questionings to myself. . . . No, that double wreck on the highway had *not* been an accident. It had been a deliberate and desperate attempt to murder me. Moreover, the dead Filipino had not been to blame. For he had not been driving that car. Someone else—whom I had not seen at all, whom apparently no one had seen—had been driving that car belonging to Lucius Midleigh.

How did I know that Hilarion Tongko was not to blame?

Because I had examined the Filipino. And I had seen enough to realize that he had not died in that car smash-up. He had already been dead for at least two hours before the accident.

I went on to Mike's broadcasting station in another taxi. Daisymae was at the receptionist's desk—and she was being very charming but firm to Mr. Ben Surgent, Mike's prospective sponsor, the man who made substitutes in plastic for metals needed in the defense industries. Tan tweeds, tan shoes, sandy-red hair and pale-ruddy mustache—he was a symphony in light auburn; a symphony gone sour, just now. His pale blue eyes were popping with annoyance, and his deep voice was pitched for swear-words.

"Mr. Norredge has got to see me right now!"

"Mr. Norredge is broadcasting."

"Look here, you go in and tell him that I got a chance to buy out Special Foods Distributors' contract with KPO for the six P.M. spot. But I'd have to close the deal today, and it's five o'clock now—"

Sweetly and shrewdly Daisymae said: "I'm sure Mr. Norredge wouldn't object."

"But damn it, I'd have to pay through the nose for that contract! Five grand a week and a bonus! Before I make up my mind, I want to see what kind of a show your 'Sensation Hour' is. That's a reasonable request, isn't it?"

It was. Daisymae covered up by saying: "I'm sorry, Mr. Surgent, but the actors have already left the studio!"

"At least you can tell Norredge I'm waiting out here!"

"When he finishes broadcasting, Mr. Surgent."

Surgent swore in that deep voice of his, and slouched his tweedy frame into a chair.

I asked Daisymae: "Is Lucius here?"

"No, Roger. He left with you and hasn't returned."

I had a chill of apprehension. There was something I had to learn from Daisymae.

"Have dinner with me?" I asked her.

"I'd love to. Soon as Izzy relieves me at the desk."

CHAPTER SIX



HE Treasury agent, Nolane, came striding in then as Daisymae and I started to leave. Mr. Terence Nolane was not his usual affable self; his offhand, reassuring manner was gone, and he had a perceptible *tic* to his left eyelid.

"Is Lucius Midleigh here?" he demanded abruptly.

I said, "No, Mr. Nolane."

"I've just come from his home." He took off his hat and mopped his forehead with a silk handkerchief from

his breast pocket. "I just found out about Midleigh's wife being killed this morning. Guess he had a lot on his mind today."

"Guess he did," I said.

Nolane sighed—put back his handkerchief and straightened his coat sleeve. Hand to his mouth, he discreetly hid a slight belch. Since it was too early for him to have had dinner, his lunch was evidently repeating on him. Nervous indigestion, likely, from too much worry. A policeman's lot is not a happy one, I reflected, and inwardly kicked myself. Why waste sympathy on Nolane?

"Probably I should've taken Midleigh into custody," he reflected. "When a man's upset and frantic with worry about this and that, why—no telling what he'll do. You got absolutely no idea where I can locate him?" he shot at me.

"No, and damned if I'd tell you if I had!" I snapped.

He reddened. But evidently in public service you get trained to take tantrums from the voters.

"Now, now! When a man's in trouble, his friends should ought to keep him sort of under their eye."

I turned, took Daisymae's elbow and we walked out.

"My, my, what a red-headed temper!" she murmured.

"Where'll we eat?" I said, feeling shamefaced.

"We could take a taxi and go to that French place—or walk around the corner to Barnley's. It's a jernt, but the food's decent."

"The jernt it is," I said.

We walked into Barnley's and sat down in a booth, and ordered noodle soup and Southern fried chicken.

"And dial your radio to KRO, Barnley," she requested.

Barnley turned a knob of his little set on a shelf behind the cashier's cigar counter, and brought in the sonorous blue homesickness of the New World Symphony.

"Mike's tired," Daisymae said. "Playing records again."

"How'd you happen to get into radio?" I asked. "You seem such a wholesome kind of person."

She laughed, and said, "They caught me young. My brother is to blame. 'Way back in Tulsa, once upon a time, he manufactured radio sets. He put me to work wrapping wire around oatmeal boxes. The sets sold, too. But the trouble was that there was no broadcasting station within range. So my brother set up a broadcasting outfit. At six every evening I'd play the piano, or he would read news items out of the paper. That would be our program. Now and then we'd sell a radio set—and a customer would call us up on the phone and say: 'Broadcast something, will you? I want to see if this set works.' So I'd sit down at the piano and play 'Chopsticks' or 'Rococo Rendezvous,' and nearly every time the customer would phone back and say 'Great! That was Rachmaninoff's *Prelude* you were playing, wasn't it?' And I'd say: 'Ya—sure.'"

I didn't feel especially like laughing, but her laugh was so infectious I couldn't help it.

"And where did you go from there?"

"New York, for a while. Dramatic school. Then odd jobs in front of the mike, and—well, the jobs came. Not regularly, but they came. Sometimes the jobs would come together—I was on five programs for a while, playing *Eilley Orrum* and *Lola Montez* and a girl detective in a whodunit, and a social worker and the middle-aged mother of five children—and I was twenty-three years old! That mother job was a chore."

"You got by with it?"

"I didn't expect to. The morning I was to report for the audition, I woke up with a cold. My voice sounded like an elderly foghorn with a sponge rammed down its throat. I figured I hadn't a chance for the job, especially when I arrived at the studio and found thirty other women there trying for the rôle and most of them old enough to be my mother. There wasn't any chance to use personality appeal on the judges, either. One by one we were shown into a room with nothing in it but a mike, and told to say

our piece. The voice was piped into another room where the big shots sat listening, anxious to pick out a voice that would have the right wise, motherly sound of thirty years of motherhood behind it! Well, I got the job! On account of that cold, which gave my voice just the experienced feeling they wanted! And was I scared sick!"

"Why scared?"

"I was wondering if I'd have to keep sitting in drafts from then on, to keep the furry rasp of a cold in my voice!"

"You've been rather successful then, haven't you?"

"Oh, I've had my panics and my kicks in the teeth, Roger. Once I had my choice between going into 'This Man's House,' and a mystery serial called 'Blue Murder.' And I picked the Blue Murder contract, and in thirteen weeks the mystery was solved and 'Blue Murder' was off the air—and 'This Man's House,' has been running for five years and going better than ever right now!"

BARNLEY bustled up with the soup then; and followed fast with covered skillets of fried chicken. Well, I got the soup down; and I made a fair start on the chicken. Then abruptly I couldn't choke down another mouthful. I was too worried. I tried to pretend appetite.

"Roger—"

I looked up. Daisymae had put down her fork and was smiling ruefully at me.

"I feel like that too." She pushed her plate aside.

"Captain Michaelford is trying to pin a murder on you. Who *did* kill Natalie, Roger?"

"I don't know."

"Who do you *think*?"

She reached her hand out and put her cool fingers on mine.

Well, I've been lonely. I've felt like a stray too often. That little gesture of sympathy and confidence got to me.

I said: "I think Lucius Midleigh killed his wife. I think that Lucius' house-boy, a Filipino named Hilarion Tongko, was in the house at the time and likely saw it all. So Lucius killed him, to silence a witness. Then Lucius tried to put the blame on me. He telephoned a friend that I was coming to see him, and that I was in a mood to do murder. Then, to supply a motive for me, he put some snapshots out where the cops would get them."

"Snapshots of what?"

"Of me and Natalie, on a cruise three years ago. Of me standing with my arm around Natalie, looking lover-like. The idea was to make the law think that Natalie and I had had a shipboard romance, and that I'd come back to ask her to leave Lucius—and when she refused, that I'd stabbed her."

"But Roger! If Captain Michaelford really has fallen for that, he'd have you locked up right this minute."

"That's so. Michaelford wants a stronger case, and he's giving me rope with the idea that maybe I'll snarl my neck in it. And because Michaelford *hasn't* a strong enough case against me as yet, Lucius is taking more drastic steps. Awhile ago I was nearly killed in a car accident, and the signs indicate that Lucius was the so-and-so who tried to smash me up."

"But *why*, Roger?"

"I don't know. First, he was content to merely frame a murder on me. Now he's trying to kill me—as if throwing the guilt for his wife's murder onto me isn't enough. As if, all of a sudden, he's simply got to wipe me out."

Her fingers tightened impulsively on my hand, and her lovely gray eyes shadowed with deep concern.

"You've got to be careful, Roger!"

"Of course."

"You *sure* that Lucius has been to blame for all that's happened?"

I wasn't. There were holes in my structure of suspicion—loose ends that needed tying into place. For instance—what was Daisymae's own part in the day's happenings?

"Will you tell me something, Daisymae?"

"Anything, Roger." She smiled, and my pulse raced; I had an impulse to lean across the table and kiss her.

I paused a moment; the question seemed to stick in my throat. "You opened your purse awhile ago, and I saw a string of pearls inside. How long have you been carrying them around like that?"

"Since this morning," she said promptly.

"Who—I mean, wh-where'd you get them?"

"From Mike."

"From Mike!"

"Yes."

My tone made her stare at me, brow puckered.

"You see, Roger, this string of pearls was Mike's present to me when we were married. He'd inherited them from his mother. Well, when I left Mike, I was feeling pretty bitter. I didn't take with me a single thing he'd given me, not even that string of pearls. Well, I had a car accident, and some weeks in the hospital left me broke. To get back into radio, I've got to put up a front and bide my time. I needed money. So I swallowed my pride and asked Mike if I could have the pearls back. They're really valuable, and I hope to borrow enough on them to see me on my feet again."

I saw an appalling hole in her story.

"Mike gave them to you this morning?"

"Yes. You see, they're something of a big heirloom in Mike's family, and when I left Mike and didn't take them, he loaned them to Natalie to wear. When I wrote Mike and asked for them back, he wrote that he'd get the string from Natalie and leave it at my hotel this morning, on his way to work. That's what he did. I didn't see him when he stopped by. I didn't see him until I came to the broadcasting studio."

"Is—the string broken? Some of the pearls missing?"

"The string is broken, but I don't know if any of the pearls are actually missing, though. Why are you so concerned about them?"

I said: "Mind letting me look at them now?"

She opened her purse and drew out an open envelope from which some of the pearls had rolled, and started to hand them all to me—then hesitated.

"Roger! You don't believe that these have anything to do with—what's happened, do you?"

I thought of those pearls on the floor of Natalie Midleigh's kitchen, stained with her own blood. But instead of answering, I just reached and took the pearls from Daisymae's suddenly cold fingers.

"Did you wipe these off?" I asked her.

"Yes—I did give them a hasty wipe—"

On some of the gems there was still a faint smudge.

"Daisymae," I asked, "do you think that Mike—that he might've had some trouble getting these pearls back from Natalie?"

"Yes, I do," she said, very soberly. "Natalie had a grasping streak in her, and she was—oh, ambitious to have fine things." Abruptly she caught a stabbing breath, and her lovely face turned very pale. "Roger! You don't think Mike— Good heavens, Mike wouldn't hurt anybody for any crazy reason like money or these pearls or— Mike's too decent! He's too fine, I tell you!"

I DIDN'T answer her. I just sat there, feeling numb and sick. Here was a vast flaw in my reasoning. Here was a huge loophole in the structure of suspicion I'd built up to fasten guilt upon Lucius Midleigh. For it might have been Mike Norredge, *not* Lucius, who had stabbed Natalie and killed the Filipino house-boy and tried to frame me for the killings.

Unless Daisymae had been lying to me just now—

I realized, then, that the two people I cared for most in all the world were buoyant young Mike and this lovely girl sitting across the table, looking at me with so much of aching concern in her gray eyes. And one of them, perhaps, was a merciless killer. . . .

I took Daisymae back to Station KRO. I went on to St. Bartholomew's Hospital to get my car, which I had left parked outside. In the car was that small, fancy .25-caliber automatic which had dropped from Natalie Midleigh's dying hand, early that morning. I placed the weapon in my pocket. Morbidly, I reflected that maybe I'd need it.

I returned to Mike's studio then.

I found Mike and Izzy and Daisymae sitting in Mike's office, frowning in concentration.

"Lo, Roger," Mike said, managing a warm grin. "We're trying to dope out a way to convert into money the fourteen grand in gold coin that Lucius left here."

"Got any ideas?" I asked.

"Ideas!" Izzy snorted. "Me and Benjamin Franklin stopped having ideas at practically the same time."

"Gold coins?" I thought aloud. "Y'know, people used to give away gold coins as prizes—"

"Sa-a-ay!" Izzy blurted. "I could take a gold coin to every hock shop in the city—"

"Right!" Mike snapped. "Your father gave you the coin, years ago, for making good grades in school!"

"Right! And now I got to hock it to eat—"

"You'd have to be convincing," said Daisymae, turning one of the coins in her fingers.

"I'll have a sob in my voice," said Izzy, with a sob in his voice. "I'll say: 'How well do I remember that day, twenty-five years ago, when I came home from school with my grade card. I had 100 in arithmetic! I was a genius! And Pop was so proud—'"

"You'd have to be *damn*' convincing," Daisymae repeated dryly. "For this gold eagle which your Pop gave you twenty-five years ago for being a genius at arithmetic—this coin has on it the date it was minted. And the date is 1930. *Some* genius!"

"But here's what we can do!" Mike said, his lean face lighting up. "We'll melt the gold coins into articles we can hock. Into cups, cigarette-cases, bracelets—"

"You going to parlay two typewriters and a dictaphone into a jewelry factory overnight?" Daisymae asked quietly.

Stricken silence quenched Mike's inspiration.

Daisymae sat there quietly by the desk, her slender fingers folded in her lap, her lovely face thoughtful. Izzy and Mike paced to and fro in the tight orbits of their worry. I offered Daisymae a cigarette and took one myself.

Mike, tight-lipped, shook his head in baffled dismay.

"Two hundred grand at my fingertips, yet—"

Izzy said: "I promised my wife she'd never have to take in washing. She promised me that I'd never have to dig ditches. But something tells me that one of us is *not* going to be a man of his word!"

Daisymae put in firmly: "There's just one thing to do with the gold, Mike. Take it all to—"

"Sa-ay!" Mike yelled. "We could make *medals* of the gold! You can always hock medals!"

"Right!" said Izzy. "Medals for running and swimming."

"Better make it checkers and Old Maid," counseled Daisymae. "Izzy's paunch arrives about ten minutes before he does."

"Be serious!" Mike said.

"Be *sensible*."

"You talk as if we're still married!"

"Mike, darling, you just don't have *time* to make plaques and fobs out of these coins and go peddling them. You've got to put on 'Sensation Hour' tomorrow night. So there's just one sensible thing to do. Get all the gold coin and turn it over to the Treasury Department, and tell 'em exactly how you got it."

Mike's jaw set. "And Lucius would go to prison."

I said: "He's got it coming to him, Mike."

"Gosh, Roger, I just can't. Anyway, it would do us no good."

"It would," said Daisymae. "The Government pays ten per cent of funds recovered from evaders of Internal Revenue laws to people who report tax-dodgers. I think

you'd get ten per cent of two hundred thousand dollars—say, twenty thousand. That would solve your worries."

"I'm no stool," Mike said doggedly.

"Of course you're not, and I love you for it. But Mike, Lucius is practically caught."

Stubbornly Mike shook his head.

"I won't do it."

Daisymae opened her purse then, and drew out the envelope containing that broken string of fine pearls.

With the warmth of generosity that struck me as being characteristic of her, she said: "Mike, you can pawn these with Simons. He'll lend four thousand on them. That'll do you until you get sponsors!"

Mike swallowed hard, and his refusal was very reluctant.

"No, Daisymae. It's just like you to offer it, in spite of my having been something of a heel as far as you're concerned."

"Take them, Mike!"

"I couldn't, even if I were willing to, honey. Look at this," he said, picking up a sheaf of news-broadcast notes from his desk. One item he selected from the bunch and held it out to her. "This is from the seven P.M. news-broadcast."

She took it, and I bent to read it over her shoulder. "MYSTERY KILLING Baffles POLICE" was the heading.

Mrs. Natalie Midleigh, of Fremont Terrace, was brought to St. Bartholomew's Hospital this morning in a dying condition from a stab wound. Brought to the hospital by Dr. Roger Lathburn, formerly of this city, the popular young matron had died before revealing circumstances of the attack upon her.

Capt. Michaelford of the Homicide Bureau revealed that robbery may have been the motive for the murder. Though the police are not yet ready to reveal full details, Capt. Michaelford said that pearls had been found scattered on the floor of the Midleigh kitchen. Some of the pearls had a faint smudge of blood upon them. It is possible, Capt. Michaelford said, that Mrs. Midleigh had been killed so that her pearl necklace could be taken. Police are searching for the missing necklace in usual underworld sources.

"You see?" Mike said to Daisymae. "If I tried to hock those pearls, I'd be grabbed and locked up."

Though it made me feel like a traitor, I couldn't help but wonder: Was that the only reason Mike didn't want to be questioned by the police?

CHAPTER SEVEN



ND then Miss Cecily Wayne sailed in, towing a couple of handsome young men in evening clothes.

"Mike! I told the boys your acting company went out on strike on you, and they volunteered to help put on a program!"

It seemed that one of the lads was a concert violinist, and the other had a voice. Cecily, it proved, was a pianist. Also a knockout. She was dressed in white satin and a scarlet cloak, and her hair looked as if spun out of eighteen-karat gold. They were on their way to a big movie premiere, it seemed, but Cecily's generous instincts sidetracked them here to help Mike. And as Cecily's slim, expensive fingers rippled over the keys of the big piano in the sound stage, we all sat up.

"She's good," Daisymae said. "She's—actually real. . . . Roger,"—I saw her lips were trembling,—"take me home?"

Mike was in the announcer's booth, so we left without a good-night.

"Where to?" I asked Daisymae, out in my car.

"Oh, I don't really want to go home. I couldn't sleep, anyhow. The way I feel, I want a good shoulder to cry on." I leaned over and kissed her, and she said: "That was awfully nice of you, Roger. I think maybe it—helps."

"Now I'll take you home," I said. "I've got work to do."
I could feel her tauten.

"What are you up to now?"

"I'm going to Lucius' house, to hunt for the knife that killed Natalie. There might be fingerprints on it."

"But the police've gone over the house a couple times."

"Uh-huh. But remember, I grew up in that house. It was my stepfather's. Maybe I know where to look."

"Get started. I'm going with you." And as I hesitated, she said: "I absolutely insist. So get going."

I realized Captain Michaelford might have a "tail" on me; so I did some fancy dodging through a snarl of traffic on the way to Lucius' house.

Reaching Fremont Terrace, I drove slowly past. I wanted to see if Captain Michaelford had posted any cops on the place. But I saw nobody, and no squad car was parked out front.

I turned down a side-street and stopped.

"Sit here," I said. "If anybody comes to the house, blow the horn."

"A lo-o-on-ng note," she said.

I walked down the alley and got into the back yard. A new fence had been put up since my time, but the gate was not locked. I walked across the yard toward the house. I had a flashlight I'd taken from a holder on the steering-wheel of my rented car, but I didn't need to use it; the yard was too familiar.

I reached the French doors at the back, and stood there a moment, listening, straining to see around me in the darkness. I saw no one and heard no one.

The French doors—unless the lock had been changed since I left—were fastened with a latch which I had always been able to open by slipping a card through the crack between the two doors. I tried it now, and it worked. I stepped into the long living-room at the rear of the house.

For a moment I stood there. It seemed to me that the odor of cigarette-smoke was stale-sweet in my nostrils—but very, very faint. I shrugged and hauled my mind back to business. I was here to look for the knife which had been used to stab Natalie Midleigh.

If I had done that murder in the kitchen of this house, where would I throw the incriminating weapon? . . . Into the garbage pail or incinerator in the back yard? But certainly the police had thoroughly searched them. Into a kitchen cupboard? Or behind the kitchen range? Or under the refrigerator? Just as surely had the cops looked in those spots too. Behind books in the shelves on either side of the big fireplace at the end of the living-room? No cop would overlook such a place.

As I walked into the dark, familiar kitchen, I distinctly heard a creak. I stiffened, my heart hammering into my throat. Understand, I'm not afraid of a quarrel or a fight. But somehow, at night, when you're under tension, mere nervousness is multiplied into something like terror. I stood there taut, my right hand clutching the fancy little automatic that Natalie Midleigh had dropped in my car. But I heard no more creaks. Maybe I'd been imagining it.

I got busy. I opened the flour-bin in the kitchen cabinet. It was empty and clean.

And then I nearly yelled aloud in heart-choking panic. I whirled, whipping up the automatic pistol—

"Roger!"

The figure looming darkly in the doorway was Daisymae. Her whisper was so frightened that I hurried to switch my light back on.

"Daisymae, why in the world—"

"Roger, a taxi stopped at the corner, and I saw Lucius get out. He walked on past the house then, acting as if he was going somewhere in a hurry, but he was looking to make sure that nobody was here. I think—"

"He'll be coming in."

"Y-yes!"

"We'll watch for him. If I can find that murder knife and grab him too, it'll be a good night's work."

"Then you haven't found it?"

"Not yet. But—"

I racked my wits, thinking hard. As a kid, I'd had a couple of secret hiding-places here. Lucius, though older than I, had sometimes come in on kid games with me. Now, where would I have hidden something I especially wanted not be found, when I was a youngster?

"That big fireplace in the living-room?" Daisymae said. "Come on."

I turned my flash beam into the fireplace. It was empty. "How about the chimney? And loose bricks?"

"Didn't use to be any," I said. And then I almost whooped as a hunch hit me with electrifying certainty. If Lucius had wanted to hide a murder weapon, there was one place. . . . "Come on!"

THEN Daisymae's fingers grasped my wrist with a convulsive, panicky grip. Her lips against my ear, she whispered: "Roger, there's somebody standing in the archway to the hall! He's moved now, but I could see him against the windows beside the front door!"

I jerked my head around. I could see nothing. I said, "Stay right here!" and I darted across the long living-room to the hall archway. But I could hear no one in the dark hall; and when I flashed my light an instant, I could see no one.

I went back to her, drew her along with me to the hallway and back to the closet under the stairs. Inside this closet was a small door opening onto the basement steps. We went down the steps, my flashlight beam showing the way. I guided Daisymae past the two furnaces, past the storerooms and the laundry and game-room to the far end of the basement where the brick chimney base rose from the concrete floor in a tapering monolith.

"Oh, I see what you meant!" Daisymae whispered. "If Lucius threw the murder weapon down the ash vent of the fireplace, the knife would be in the ashes collected at the bottom?"

In the base of the brick chimney was an iron door, through which the collected ashes could be shoveled out for removal.

I opened the iron door. It creaked and clanged, and I swore under my breath. I turned my light beam into the opening.

"Why, the ashes have all been cleaned out!" Daisymae blurted with dismay.

The inside of the chimney base was so clean it was almost antiseptic. Clean—and empty.

"Uh-huh—the police looked here," I said. "But they didn't know what I know."

Inside the chimney base, up just under the fireplace proper, a section of brick and plaster had fallen out, leaving a hole that was narrow but long and deep. I had discovered it, doing my chores around the house, one of which had been to clean out the fireplace ashes. It had been my kid safe-deposit box, my secret. I had shown it once to Lucius. I was eight years old at the time—and now, as I stuck my head into the chimney and flashed my light up, recollections swarmed in my brain with a vividness and a lost, homesick force that brought a blur to my eyes and a swelling to my throat. I had been completely secure and happy while my mother was alive—and a little bit lost and confused ever since, though usually the problems and routine of adulthood pushed that old aching far into the uneasy depths of the mind.

Looking up into the chimney now, that old recess looked like a mere shadow on the wall.

I climbed into the chimney, got up on my knees and turned my light full into the recess. Behind me, Daisymae whispered, "Anything there?" and I was thinking, "Probably it's empty." My pulse was hammering, and I was holding my breath with suspense—

The recess wasn't empty. And I realized that I'd *known* it wouldn't be empty. Not that I found a blood-stained

knife lying hidden here. There was no weapon in the hole. But here in the recess were neat stacks of paper-wrapped cylinders. Stack upon stack, stack upon stack, carefully and shrewdly packed in solid columns. I reached in with one hand and grabbed a couple of the cylinders. They were so heavy they almost pulled out my fingers as I bent and scrouged back out of the chimney base.

"Look, Daisymae!" I said. "For God's sake, look at this! Feast your eyes on what made Croesus drunk!"

And putting the flashlight on the floor, I bent and twisted one of the paper cylinders, saying: "There's more where this came from. A lot more, a whole lot more. *Two hundred thousand dollars' worth!*"

Out of the torn paper cylinder in my hands cascaded double eagles, twenty-dollar gold-pieces, clattering upon the concrete with a fat, smug ring and shining with greasy complacency under the flashlight beam.

Daisymae gasped. "Good Heavens! Lucius!"

On our knees we just hunkered there, staring. . . .

Then—we both heard it.

A whisper—a sharp, sibilant whisper.

Instinctively I jerked up my flashlight. And there on the stairs, suddenly looming in the light beam, was Lucius.

And then the basement rocked to the heavy concussion of a .45 pistol, and brick fragments spattered the side of my face from the impact of the bullet. Instantly I was pulling Daisymae flat to the floor, my flashlight out—as that gun blazed fire from the stairway.

A second time, a third and fourth time, the heavy slugs tore craters into the bricks of the chimney base. The little automatic was in my fist then, and I squeezed the trigger once at the fire-spurts of that other gun.

The deafening reports ceased, though the thudding echoes seemed to swing and carom in the walled space of the basement. I didn't wait. Pulling Daisymae's arm, I drew her recklessly across the dark room, and risked a quick dart of light from the flash to find the way to the other stairs which led out of the basement—a wide flight of rough-timbered steps leading up to cellar doors which opened out onto the back yard.

"We'll get out of here in a second," I whispered to Daisymae. "Let me go first to open the cellar doors!"

I felt my way up the broad steps. They creaked under me, and I swore as if at a traitor. Reaching up in the blackness, I felt the wide doors and got set to push hard in case the hasp on the outside was fastened by half a clothespin or a padlock. I'd push hard enough to tear the hasp out by the nail roots, I was thinking—

Amazingly, terrifyingly, one of the twin doors was lifting, was folding back of its own accord.

Lucius! Bent over, lifting with one hand, a pistol in the other, metal gleaming dully—Lucius, looming over me, a black bulk of doom. I felt terror in that instant, and I reacted as wildly and instinctively as a strangling man lashes out against an assailant. The little automatic spat fire from my fist, emptying itself in a stuttering thin roar.

And Lucius crumpled, sprawled down through the opened doorway, falling upon me, knocking me down the stairs locked together with him, both of us hitting the concrete floor with force that for an instant left me paralyzed.

Daisymae was screaming. I started struggling. Lucius was a heavy bulk against me, but inert. I pulled away. The flashlight was still in my left hand, and I switched it on, lurching to my feet.

"I had to do it!" I was saying over and over to Daisymae, as we looked at the body sprawled there in such clay-like, sodden lifelessness. "I had to do it. Another instant, and he would have—"

Daisymae was staring in speechless shock, in stunned unbelieving amazement! Words died in my throat; and despair, hopeless despair shook me, wrung me, jarred me like thunder inside my very brain—

I couldn't believe it. Within myself I cried out against it. It couldn't be. It just *could—not be!* But it *was*, and

the consequences were blindingly plain to me in that very half-second of time.

This man lying here crumpled in death, this bulk of shattered and lifeless flesh, was not Lucius Middleigh.

It was Nolane. It was Mr. Nolane, the Treasury officer. Daisymae was shaking me.

"Roger! Roger! Don't take it like that. It was self-defense. You had to do it. You just had to do it!"

"So Lucius has won out," I was thinking. "I'll hang for this."

"He shot at us, Roger! I'll swear to that. Four times he shot at us! It was self-defense!"

I said: "Lucius managed it. Lucius led him onto us."

"Of course he did! I'll swear to that. I'm a witness."

"It's murder, Daisymae. I've murdered Nolane."

"You don't know what you're saying, Roger!"

I knew, all right. I'd murdered a law officer, and I'd hang. And Lucius had trapped me into it. Why? Why did Lucius have it in for me like that? *Why?*

I was asking it out loud, without realizing it. And Daisymae was crying, and pulling on my arm.

"Let's go to the police. I'll tell exactly what happened, Roger! It was self-defense. They'll believe it—"

"Self-defense! Us down in a basement, raking hoarded gold out of a cache, and a Treasury man who's been on the trail of that gold for months. Self-defense! *He caught us dead to rights*, they'll say. *He caught us dead to rights—and we gunned him down. He was just doing his job, and we gunned him down.* They'll hang me, I tell you!"

"But he shot at us! We can show the marks on the bricks—"

"So it was a gun fight, and we gave it to him. He was doing his duty, and that makes it murder—plain bloody murder!"

A siren was yowling down-street—getting louder fast.

"People heard the shots!" Daisymae gasped. "Sent for the police! Roger! Come on, *come on!*"

We started running—wildly, blindly.

CHAPTER EIGHT



OUT of the back yard, into the alley we fled. Down the alley to the next side-street, which dead-ended onto an avenue parallel to Fremont. I was gasping like an asthmatic, and my heart seemed to be choking in my throat. I kept listening for that approaching siren to squeeze off into silence as the squad car turned into Lucius' driveway. But the siren did not fade. It grew louder. Panic wild-fired into my brain as I realized that the police car had not stopped at the house, but was coming on. Down that side-street, turning into the avenue—coming right after us! Daisymae's fingers dug convulsively into my arm—

With a roar and screech the car passed us, racing on down the avenue. And I leaned back against the wall of a house, my muscles weak and shaking; and Daisymae was laughing, with an edge of hysteria to her laugh, and gasping out, as if the words were formed of sharp-cornered letters that stuck in her throat—

"It's not a police car at all, Roger! It's an ambulance. It's an *ambulance*. It's not a police car coming after us at all!"

And then I was sitting on the curb, retching as if my body were trying to turn itself inside out to cast out the guilt that stained me to the soul. Daisymae sat beside me, her strong young arm about my shoulders, trying to ease me, trying to comfort me, and she was crying and didn't even know it. People passing in cars stared at us; we looked like drunks in a crying jag; at the moment we weren't aware.

All I was thinking as Daisymae helped me to my feet was that now I knew what it was like when a doctor told you

that your heart would quit soon and without warning; now I knew what doom was; now I knew what a man felt standing sullen and bowed in front of a judge intoning "—till you're dead." Now I knew how little I'd known when I myself had had to tell an incurable—

Daisymae was shaking me.

"Roger, nobody can prove you shot Nolane!"

"Lucius can."

"Oh! But he didn't actually see it happen!"

"He saw enough and heard enough to convince a jury."

"B-but how good a witness can he be? Himself a criminal! It's just his bare word!"

"And my fingerprints."

"What fingerprints? Where?"

"On the gun. On the .25-caliber gun that'll match the .25-caliber slugs in Nolane."

"Roger! You haven't the gun with you?"

"No." I couldn't remember what I'd done with the little automatic—whether I'd flung it from my hand as a thing of horror, or dropped it as Nolane's body had come sprawling terrifyingly down upon me. "It's probably back there. In the basement."

"Roger!" All her dismay was eloquent in that word. "I'll go back and get the gun."

"You'll not go back." I grabbed her arm. I grabbed her arm so tightly she winced and cried out. "Lucius wants me caught. Lucius has worked all this just to get me caught. By now he's phoned the police. If we go back, we'll walk right into their hands!"

"Then you've got to leave. You've got to drive south to Tijuana or El Centro and cross the border!"

We got to my rented car, though the suspense was an exquisite agony. Daisymae started back toward Mike's radio studio. She was still thinking far more clearly than I.

"Roger, you can't drive south in this car. If the police send out an alarm for you, the people you rented the car from can give the license number and model, and the highway patrol would stop you. I tell you what! We'll take Mike's car."

"You're not coming with me. Don't argue. You're not coming!"

"All right," she agreed. Too readily, I presently realized.

I didn't say anything more, but just sat there. The awfulness of what I had done repeated on me, hitting in appalling waves of realization like a nauseating sickness that wrung me, and eased, that wrung me and eased in numbness, then wrung me in anguish again. . . . *So now it was I who'd be running for the border. This morning that man who'd held a gun on me and Lucius in the dark lounge of Mike's radio station—that man had savagely ordered Lucius to climb into a car and race for the border as fast as he could make it. But Lucius hadn't gone. Lucius was staying. It was I who was running—running for my life. . . .*

Mike's car was parked around the corner from his studio, on the radio-station parking lot. The ignition was locked. Daisymae told me to wait there a minute. She went inside the station and came back presently with the car key.

"Start, Roger. Hurry!"

But she delayed me. She clung to me, her lips against my mouth, crying; her lips salt with tears. I put my arms around her and held her; and it was good to do, it was comforting to do.

Then I thought of something, and I didn't let go of her.

"You're not going back to that house to find the gun!" I said savagely, and I pushed back and looked at her.

"Oh—all right. I won't."

She didn't say it right. She was lying.

Abruptly I slid into the car—and pulled her in after me.

"I'm making sure!"

"Then let's get started!"

I stepped on the starter.

"I'm wondering where we can cross the border. Maybe there's a map in that dash compartment."

She opened the compartment door. It was crowded, and a couple of things fell to the floor. I bent and retrieved them.

"Put these back—"

I choked in the middle of my sentence. One of the articles I held was a folded newspaper—and the paper had a dark, ominous stain. My hands suddenly shaking, I unwrapped the paper.

And there under the dashboard light, Daisymae and I stared in dazed, unbelieving silence at what had been wrapped in the paper. I recognized the article. I had seen it often, years ago. It was a Christmas present I had given my stepfather when I was twelve years old—a present I had bought with money I'd earned mowing lawns in the neighborhood. I'd been reading "Ivanhoe," so I had been real excited about buying this present: it was a miniature Crusader's long-sword. A letter-opener, of course—with a blade of steel, and a silver handle inlaid with imitation jewels! Crusty and eccentric as my stepfather had been, he'd seen pride in my presenting it to him, and he had thanked me graciously. Just a miniature, it was—and yet it had dealt death.

The blade was crusted with dried blood.

Here, I knew, was the knife which had stabbed Natalie Midleigh. Here, hidden in Mike Norredge's car!

I DIDN'T start the car; I switched off the ignition. I took a flashlight out of the dashboard compartment and hastily unscrewed the lens, my fingers shaking. Then I held the knife close to the dash light, and examined the cross-shaped hilt under the lens. I was afraid that fingerprints on the handle of the knife might have been carefully rubbed off—

And they had been! Not a whorl or loop or pore-dotted ridge was to be seen on the knife-hilt.

Then my heart leaped. On the steel blade itself, just under the hilt, were fingerprints! The man who'd rubbed the handle had been in a hurry, and hadn't noticed that his fingers had touched the steel.

"Roger!" Daisymae urged. "Let's get started!"

"I'm not crossing the border."

"You mean, you're giving yourself up?"

"No. I've got a fighting chance, now. If you'll help me?"

"Of course, Roger! How?"

"Look, Daisymae. Fingerprints on this knife!"

"Whose? I m-mean, have you got any idea?"

Her voice had gone hollow and taut.

"The fingerprints of the man who stabbed Natalie. We're going to find out whose prints they are!"

"That still won't help you in regard to shooting Nolane!"

"Maybe, maybe not. If I can prove that Lucius killed Natalie and tried to frame me, I'll be clear of that, and—"

"And what? How'll that help you in regard to Nolane?"

"Right now, I don't know," I conceded. "Daisymae, take this knife to Captain Michaelford of the Homicide Bureau. Ask him to look up the fingerprints. When he identifies them, he'll identify Natalie Midleigh's murderer!"

Daisymae was shrinking away from me. Abruptly I understood.

This knife was found in Mike's car. If he had stabbed Natalie, then Daisymae would be handing him over to the police.

"Look, honey," I said. "I can't believe Mike killed anybody. Not if he's the person I think he is. On the other hand, if he's not the fine, decent chap we've always believed—then even you wouldn't want him to get away with murder. Would you?"

She was a long time answering that. Her voice low and aching, she finally said: "You can take him or leave him for what he is, Roger. But I have to take him for what he's been to me."

"Oh! Then I'll go—"

"No." She caught a shaky breath. "Mike's prints aren't on file anywhere. I'll take the knife to Michaelford. I won't say it came from Mike's car. So if Michaelford *does* have these fingerprints on record, then they aren't Mike's. If he does not have them filed—then I'll warn Mike to get away."

"Fair enough. Go right now, will you?"

I got out of the car and she slid under the wheel.

Pulling out onto the drive, she headed for town.

Me, I stood there, doubts whipping my brain around.

Was Daisymae actually going to the Homicide Bureau now? Or would she find an oil-well sump or a deep hole somewhere, and toss that murder knife into it?

I walked on into the radio station. I'd lie low here, while I did some thinking and planned my next move, and waited to hear from Daisymae. Izzy was at the receptionist's desk. He said: "Mike's out—busy turning over stones and sweeping under carpets to get actors for our show."

"Lucius been around?" I asked, trying to keep my voice matter-of-fact.

"No, but he phoned a little while ago, and asked if you were here. I said no, and he said he'd be by, after a bit."

The phone pealed. Izzy winced, framed an oath with his thick lips and snatched up the telephone.

"H'lo! . . . Who? . . . Yeah, yeah, he's right here—"

And Izzy thrust the phone at me.

I'd gestured violently for him to say I was not here, but now the damage was done. Maybe it was Daisymae, anyway—

"Hello?" I said into the phone. "Hello. Hello!"

There was no answer. Then I heard the click as the receiver was put on the hook at the other end. Dazedly I stood there, holding the phone.

"Sounded familiar," Izzy said.

"He hung up without saying a word. Who was it?"

Izzy scowled as he kneaded his memory.

"Gosh, Roger, I just can't remember."

"Lucius?"

"Positively not Lucius. But who else it might've been—" Izzy shrugged clear to his ears.

My hands were shaking as I put the phone down. Perhaps it had been somebody from Captain Michaelford's office, trying to locate me?

I had a wild impulse to run, to get out of there, but I checked it. I wanted to hear from Daisymae, first. I wanted to ask Mike some questions, too.

I stalked out of Mike's office and went down the hall to that lounge at the back. I switched on the light, and stuck a cigarette in my mouth and paced the floor, trying to figure out how I could ask questions of Mike which might reveal any guilt on his mind without revealing my purpose in asking. But I couldn't think. I was jittery as an interne attempting his first appendectomy. I kept recalling that it was here in this room that somebody had held a gun on me and Lucius, and warned Lucius to jump into a car and race for the border—

I stopped short, and swore aloud as a hunch hit me hard. "The man who just called on the phone and asked Izzy if I was here—then hung up as I took the phone—I bet *he's* the man who held a gun on us! *He's* the man who ordered Lucius to run for the border!" And then I guessed something further: "He's trying to locate me. Now that he knows I'm here—he'll be coming here!"

It was just a guess. But somehow it had an awful certainty for me. . . .

I realized, then, that I was hearing a low undertone of voices from the hallway. I opened the hall door, and cautiously walked to the door of Mike's office.

He was inside, with a half-dozen people, holding a rehearsal. I opened the door and looked in. Listening to Mike's instructions, I realized that his "Sensation Hour" show was to be a swing version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." That was Americana, all right. And if his treatment of it

was as good as the *Hot Mikado* I'd seen at the World's Fair, he really had something. But just how he could whip a raw cast into shape by tomorrow night was something I couldn't see. Of course, this was radio, not the stage. The actors could work right from their scripts.

"All right, let's get on," Mike was saying. "Miss Jacques, you're a soprano?"

"Sopr-r-ano?" She shook her head. "Contr-r-ralto."

He thrust some music into her hands. She was a slim, olive-complexioned young woman with poise and sophistication.

"Let's hear you sing a bit of this."

She looked at the music, dark brows arched, jabbed at the notation with a forefinger and looked at Mike.

"Yeah, go ahead," he said impatiently, nodding.

"La, la—" Her voice rose with ringing, thrilling force as she la-la-ed part of an aria.

"Swell, swell!" Mike praised. "You'll play *Eliza*. Now let's get the feel of the first act. At the start, you're in your cabin, *Eliza*. You see *Simon Legree* whipping *Uncle Tom*. Your baby is crying. You croon to it. You say, 'Hush, chile. I aint agoin' to stay here. I aint agoin' to let you grow up here to be whipped like that.' Now, you try it. You're crooning to your baby—"

She looked at Mike, her dark eyes bewildered.

"Go on, go on!"

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*"

"Oh, speak up, for gosh sakes!"

The slim olive-skinned woman turned to the woman sitting beside her, and poured out a torrent of words I couldn't understand.

"What's she saying?" Mike snapped.

The fat woman said: "She's saying that she's sung for the Metropolitan, for the Chicago Opera and La Scala—"

"Sure, she's swell, she's great," Mike interrupted, almost shouting. "But can't she just *talk* a few lines?"

"In French, or German or Italian, yes—but she can't speak the English!"

Mike's arms dropped, and he slumped back in his chair, his lean young face draining white with discouragement. Wearily he said: "You, Miss Mayer—you'll play *Little Eva*. Your first lines—"

I didn't hear the rest. A hand had tightened on my arm, and Daisymae was saying: "Roger, I've got to talk to you!"

I turned. Daisymae had come in. Her lovely face was aglow with relief.

"Roger, those fingerprints *were* on file! Captain Michaelford is all excited about getting the murder weapon, and to find *prints*—"

"Whose fingerprints are they?" I broke in.

"Not Mike's at all. They belong to a man who's wanted by the police. An ex-convict who's broken his parole. A man with a lot of aliases. His last was Flinn. He's a confidence man with a long record!"

I took it in like a long, slow breath. Daisymae looked up at me, anxious to see relief on my face. And I did feel relief. But with it came bewilderment.

THIS meant there was an unknown in this set-up of trouble—someone moving on the outskirts of our group, keeping hidden, darting in when he saw a chance to strike a blow, and disappearing before we could seize him or even identify him—as that man had done who held up me and Lucius in the lounge-room here, and ordered Lucius to run for the border.

That man was Ed Flinn! Natalie Midleigh's murderer! That man was the one unknown factor in this damnable equation I was trying to solve.

Then I thought of the puzzling phone-call Izzy had received a little while ago. I thought of the voice—which had seemed somehow familiar to Izzy—asking if I were here at the studio. Then when I had answered the phone, the man had hung up.

"Ed Flinn, I bet! Trying to locate me."

He had located me. Maybe he was hunting me. Maybe he'd be showing up right here, any time now.

"That suits me fine," I decided. "I'll just wait right here for him."

I took Daisymae's arm and drew her toward the lounge. "Something I can't understand," I whispered to her. "How'd Captain Michaelford treat you? Doesn't he seem to know yet that Nolane's been killed?"

"He *did* look surprised. He came out of his chair in a rush when I walked in, and the first thing he asked was where you were."

"But you didn't tell him?"

"Of course not! I got busy showing him the murder knife."

"Didn't he insist you tell him where I was?"

She nodded. "To tell you the truth, I thought for a bit he wasn't going to let me go until I did tell."

I groaned inwardly. Captain Michaelford *did* know that Nolane had been shot dead, and Captain Michaelford was using strategy.

"I've got to leave! Where's Mike's car?"

"Out back, Roger; I left the motor running. Come on!"

But already I had delayed too long.

As we started down the hallway toward the back door, that door opened, and the brawny, graying head of the Homicide Bureau stepped in. I stopped short, started to turn.

"I've got a squad car out front too," said Michaelford.

Daisymae gasped. "You followed me here!" she said, understanding at last.

"Of course."

"But Roger shot in self-defense! I know he did! I saw it, I tell you. He shot after we'd been fired at four times—"

"Shooting a cop," Captain Michaelford said heavily, "shooting any law officer who's doing his duty, is automatically first-degree murder. Both of you, come along."

I had just an instant to try to think.

I whipped a little packet from my vest pocket. I tore it open swiftly, dumped two tablets into my palm as I said wildly, "You'll never take me alive!" and I popped the two tablets into my mouth.

Daisymae screamed, and I collapsed.

Captain Michaelford reached out and tried to catch me as I fell; and he did break my fall, but I slumped to the floor.

"Call an ambulance, quick!" he snapped. "Maybe we can pump it out of his stomach!"

He was turning me over and then trying to stick a big finger into my throat to make me regurgitate. He wore a Police Positive in a black leather holster on his hip. I reached out and snatched the pistol and thrust the muzzle into his midriff.

"Get back and don't move and don't talk!" I ordered.

He blinked; he had been utterly taken in by my act, and he was numb with surprise. I repeated: "Get back."

He moved back, his craggy face dark with anger.

I rose cautiously to my feet, keeping the gun leveled.

Mike and Izzy were standing in the hallway, staring, flabbergasted. I gestured for them to come closer.

"Mike, run out in back. You'll probably see a couple of plain-clothes men. Yell that I've made a break out the front door, and for those cops to run around the building to head me off."

"Don't do it!" Michaelford snapped.

"You will," I said, "under duress. I'm holding a gun on you and your friends. If you don't want them hurt, get going!"

Mike was pretty quick on the uptake. He nodded, darted past us down the hallway, and slammed the door shut behind him and yelled as I'd commanded—and we heard footbeats racing around the corner of the building.

"Don't follow me!" I snapped at Michaelford.

I darted down the hallway for the back door, went out, saw Mike's car standing there on the parking-lot, motor

running—jumped in, realized that Daisymae was following me, and shifted into gear as she slid onto the seat beside me. Out of the parking-lot I twisted the coupe, and down the drive, the motor screeching in second.

"You all right?" Daisymae was demanding frantically. "That poison you swallowed—"

"Aspirin. I got a headache!"

CHAPTER NINE



I TURNED right at the first corner, careening around it, twisted into an alley midway of the block, roared down it and crossed the next boulevard right through two lanes of traffic, and shot into the alley of the next block. Saw a row of garages fronting on the alley, and saw one standing open. Into it I twisted the car, stopped with brakes screaming. Jumped out and pulled the overhead door down hard.

"Come on!"

I drew Daisymae out the side door of the garage. We were in a bungalow court. We heard dishes being washed, radios blaring, people saying, "One no trump!" and "Just one more hand!" as we strolled up the walk between the two rows of identical houses. Reaching the sidewalk, we walked along until I saw a cruising taxi: I gestured him to the curb.

"Southern Pacific Station," I told the hackie. "Meeting friends on the eleven-five. Think you can make it?"

The hackie nodded.

We sat taut as our cab twisted and darted through traffic, our ears straining for the commanding wail of a police siren. Daisymae's fingers were tight on my hand.

"Maybe we've got away, Roger," she whispered unsteadily.

I just nodded.

"Will you take a train?" she asked then.

"No. They might be watched. Besides, I want to find Ed Flinn."

"The police've been looking for Flinn, without any luck. So what hope have you got to find him, Roger?"

"The fact that Flinn's now hunting me."

She gasped, and her hand tightened on mine.

"Natalie's murderer hunting for you!"

"Also," I went on, to take her mind off of that, "I want to locate Lucius. He can testify that it was he, not I, who's hoarded the gold. He can testify that we had just found the gold, by accident, when that Treasury man came in on us."

"But *will* he?"

"Not unless I can get enough on him to make him testify."

"You've got such precious little time to work in, Roger!"

That one I didn't even try to answer.

We were nearing the depot now.

I said: "When we reach the station, we'll separate. Mix with people off the incoming train. Meet me at the baggage-room."

The hackie pulled up at the curb; I paid him, and we walked into the depot. I stepped to the magazine counter and bought a paper. Daisymae walked on into the crowded waiting-room. . . . It was my intention, here, to leave Daisymae. I wanted to disassociate her from my troubles as much as possible.

A couple of transcontinental trains had unloaded, and I had to push my way through a crowd. I was nearing the far entrance when I saw a gray-uniformed station cop and a plain-clothes man I'd seen in Michaelford's office standing together in earnest conversation.

I about-faced and headed for the men's lavatory.

"Darling!"

Arms were around my neck. Somebody pressed close, and then lips were pressed to my mouth, warm and sweet.

And then she had stepped back and was saying in a lilting gush: "The train was a little late out of Salt Lake City. Oh, it's so good to see you!"

And then Daisymae lifted her mouth again, and—well, my kiss wasn't play-acting, either. Her color was high, and her eyes were dancing.

In a whisper as we turned toward the station entrance, she added: "You're better-looking than Mike—did you know?"

"I intended to leave you," I said severely.

She smiled happily and hugged my arm against her breast, but her low voice was taut as she said: "I know."

And then, at the depot entrance, I saw a squad car.

"Slip out by the baggage-room door," I whispered to her.

And I slid into a phone-booth near by.

I DIALED Mike Norredge's number, and I strained to hear heavy feet go past. I didn't hear them.

"Hello?" It was Mike's voice answering.

"This is me," I said.

"Oh. . . . Hello—Jones," he said.

"Mike," I said, "this morning you returned to your ex-wife a string of pearls belonging to her."

"What about 'em?"

"Tell me how you got the string."

"I stopped at my cousin's house on the way downtown this morning. He met me at the door, said Natalie was still in bed, and handed me an envelope with the pearls inside."

"Didn't you—expect some trouble getting them back?"

"I did, but— Well, have a nice trip, pal!"

He was warning me to hang up, and start moving. I hung up, turned, and my nerves stiffened. The doorway was blocked.

A very fat woman in a dark coat, wearing a scowl and a smudge of mustache on her curled lip, was waiting to use the phone. I uttered a "Thank God!" to myself, and moved to the rack holding directories at the end of the row of booths. . . . Under *Midleigh* in the book, I looked for Lucius' name—found it, and noted his business address. Then I worked through the crowd toward the entrance.

Outside, I turned toward the baggage-room. As I passed it, Daisymae stepped to my side. At the curb was a row of taxis; we stepped into the leading one, and I gave the hackie the address of Lucius' office.

Daisymae relaxed against my shoulder with a tremulous sigh.

"I'm afraid I'm a coward at heart," she murmured.

"Not you," I said.

"You're sweet, Roger," she said, and yawned, stretching her lithe body. "Gosh, I'm sleepy."

"No. It's tension."

At the corner we left the taxi and walked north to Lucius' building. I studied the dark windows of the nine-story structure, my mind racing. On the eighth floor there were lights in the windows of a firm named "*Flintridge, Publishers*." We turned into the entrance, walked into the center of the building. We stopped and looked around, surprised; in spite of myself I felt a chill crawling behind my belt-buckle.

The place looked like the fancied interior of a penitentiary. It was an old building, but in its day it had been palatial, and it was still impressive. It was constructed about a great central court open clear to the roof, and about this open space the floors rose in tiers like the cell galleries of a prison. Instead of hallways, each floor fronted onto the central court with a railed balcony, onto which opened offices. At each end of the court a grand stairway of marble and wrought iron zigzagged to the top floor. And on the north and south sides an elevator shaft rose to the ceiling.

We walked to the elevator. The operator was the night watchman. "Flintridge, Publishers," I told him.

Then up we sped to the eighth floor. Daisymae held tightly to my arm. It was a rather startling ride, for the elevator seemed suspended in space without much protection.

We got out at the eighth floor, and hurried past to the far end of the balcony. Lucius' office was on the floor below. Down the zigzag stairway we hurried. The watchman was sitting in the elevator reading a magazine, on the main floor. He didn't lift his head.

To Room 789 I led Daisymae. It was in a short corridor angling off the balcony. No light glowed on the frosted glass of Lucius' office door. On the glass was painted: "*Vita-flex, the Vitamin Complex for Muscle Tone.*"

"Now what?" Daisymae whispered.

I just stood there, looking. This was as far as I had thought ahead. I'd hoped to find Lucius here.

Daisymae carried a purse of good leather. I took it—opened it, thrust my hand inside it. I said: "Listen." Outside, down on the street below, traffic noise was constant. I swung my fist into the frosted glass. Brittle shards fell inward, onto a rug.

Taut we stood, listening for a yell from the watchman below, for a signal alarm. Nothing happened.

I reached through the hole in the glass, turned the inner knob of the lock, and pushed the door open. We stepped inside and I switched the light on, then shut the door.

It was just an ordinary office, decently furnished; yet somehow it had Lucius' flabby, neurasthenic personality stamped upon it. On the wall behind the slightly unkempt desk was a sign, "*No Smoking, Please!*" Cushions of the leather chairs were puffy of seat and limp of back. On the desk blotter was a pile of brochures describing "*Vita-flex, for Vigor.*"

"Lucius used to be in the house trailer business."

"Uh-huh," I said. "He joins every gold-rush. I can remember when he had a string of miniature golf-courses. He incorporates and sells stocks. That's how he makes money."

A small room opened off the office. We looked in there. On shelves were bottles of vitamin formulas, vials of tablets, calcium pills, iron tonics, raw vegetable compounds. And a row of formidable bottles of *Vita-flex*.

"Notice," I said, "the *Vita-flex* hasn't been used. That's to sell. For himself, he's used the other nostrums!"

I returned to Lucius' desk. Beside the blotter was one of those metal-cased telephone lists. You set a gadget and push a button, and up flies a page with the number you want on it.

I grabbed the phone-list and shoved it into my coat pocket, then started opening the desk drawers. I found a bank-book and a check-book—one of those big ones with three checks to a page. Daisymae came to my side and leaned to look, too.

"Gosh, Roger, he certainly pays a lot of doctor bills!"

I had noticed the entries. There was something odd about them. I scowled at the pages, trying to place it.

"Roger, it looks as if he's paying for major operations!"

"Last January, he'd paid two hundred fifty dollars to a Dr. Massy. In February, two hundred fifty dollars to Dr. Barst. March, the same amount to Dr. Axtell. April, to Dr. Lehman. The same sum paid every month to a different doctor."

"Roger!"

D AISYMAE's whisper was anguished with fright. Her hand tightened convulsively on my arm. I jerked my head around. Her lovely face was white. She was staring at the door.

I looked at the door. Dimly I could see a man's bulk silhouetted against the part of the frosted glass I hadn't broken out. I jumped to my feet. But even as I rose, snatching Captain Michaelford's pistol from my waistband—that man out there thrust a hand through the hole in the door glass, and something white fluttered to the carpet.

I sprang to the door, yanked it open and rushed out. And stared bewilderingly down the short corridor and the high balcony. I saw one one—no one at all.

"Maybe he disappeared into one of these dark offices?" I thought. But I couldn't go around to try each door without that watchman seeing me.

I returned to Lucius' office.

"Let's get out of here, Daisymae!"

Frowning, she held out to me that white thing which had fluttered to the carpet from the hole in the door glass. A card.

On it was printed in scrawly pencil strokes: "*See what's pasted to the bottom of the third desk drawer on the left.*"

Daisymae had turned to the desk and was pulling out that drawer. On the bottom, pasted there with cellulose tape, was a small card with notation on it—"6 right, 23 left, 13 right, 19 left, 3 right, open."

"What is it, Roger? A code?"

"No. Combination for a safe, or I'm a horse doctor! But who— Come on! We're getting out of here."

"It must be for that safe there," she said, pointing.

"Somebody's tailing us. Come on."

"You watch! This'll take just a second."

SHE knelt before the small safe on the far side of the room, and twisted the dial. Gun in hand, I watched the door, my nerves twanging in an agony of suspense. Somebody—

"It works!" she said, and pulled the safe door open.

I snapped: "See what's in there!"

"Ledgers. Bills. Money. Tax-forms. Oh—" Her exclamation had a flattened note. "Some documents."

"Shut the safe and let's go. Quick!"

"But Roger, this concerns you."

I didn't answer. It seemed that I'd heard a door creak open, down along the balcony. I stood rigid, listening.

"Roger!" Daisymae's voice was startled, concerned. "Aren't you—I mean, haven't you always thought you were Jerrold Midleigh's stepson?"

"I am. Come on, let's—"

"No. You're not. Or were not."

I jerked around to look at her. Sitting back on her heels on the floor before the safe, she was studying a paper in her hands.

"Jerrold Midleigh was my stepfather!" I said.

"No. Not according to this paper."

I stepped to her side, took the paper from her hands.

It was a birth-certificate. My own certificate. I didn't realize that at first, for the name on it was *Roger Lathburn Midleigh*. But names of the parents were *Dorothy Lowe Midleigh*, and *Jerrold Midleigh*. The date was Dec. 1, 1911. My birth date, and my mother's name. It was my own birth-certificate, all right.

"You see?" Daisymae said. "He wasn't your stepfather, but your own father. You're Jerrold Midleigh's son."

"Good Lord! I swear, I've always believed—"

It was all so confusing, so baffling, I couldn't word a coherent sentence. I sat there on my heels beside Daisymae, trying to think. . . . Why should my father have let me believe, all those years, that I was his *stepson*? And to bring the puzzle right down to the present, who was the man who'd known this certificate was in the safe here? And what was his motive in making sure that I'd find the certificate?

"Roger, somebody's coming!"

Footsteps on the marble floor of the balcony were plain—not walking, almost running. I sprang to the light-switch and clicked it off. Plainly then we heard excited talk.

"I saw 'em, I tell you! They were robbing the safe!"

I just had time to pull Daisymae back against the wall of the dark room. I'd left the door open, and into the doorway stepped the watchman, flashlight in hand. He turned its beam on the broken glass of the door—moved

the beam into the room, and stopped it on the open safe. We heard him swear.

He jerked his pistol from its holster.

"Come out! I've got the drop on you."

He tried to make it a stern command, but his voice shook. We didn't move.

He started inside, then, fumbling with his hand holding the flashlight for the light-switch. That brought him nearer us.

I lunged forward, swinging my weapon. The barrel caught him across the temple, and he staggered back against the wall and dropped. I tried to cushion the blow, but he hit the floor hard.

That other man! I waited two seconds. No word, no move. Then I moved out the door. There was no one else on the balcony.

I stepped back inside the office. Daisymae had switched the light on and was bent over the watchman. I stopped for an instant, and saw that already the man was beginning to stir.

"Come on!" I said.

We ran along the balcony to the elevator, got in, and I pressed the lever over hard, hoping I'd push the right way.

I had. Down we started.

There was an unsteady shout—from the watchman, up on the floor we'd just left. He stepped to the wall and pulled or turned something. An alarm bell sounded somewhere in the building. Then he lurched into a run to the head of the west stairway and started down. Racing us down! But the elevator was moving faster than he could negotiate the zigzagging stairway.

He leaned against the railing, lifted his pistol and across the open court he fired at us. I pulled Daisymae to the floor of the elevator, for the open shaft left us unprotected—as naked to bullets as a pilot dropping under a parachute, I was thinking as I crouched low. For an instant I wished I'd hit that watchman harder.

I jerked the lever over, and almost fell, we stopped so abruptly, as we reached ground level. Again I worked the lever, then opened the door and we jumped from the car to the main floor, a foot or so below, and ran for the entrance. There I pulled Daisymae to a walk, and we stepped out onto the street as if we were out for a stroll.

But I drew Daisymae around the corner of the building: and down that darker side-street we *ran*.

NEAR the farther corner was a little hole-in-the-wall café. The place was crowded, but I saw an empty booth at the back, and I guided her into the café. We reached the back booth, and slid into it, out of view from the front.

"I'll give the order," I told Daisymae. "You sidle back to the little girls' room, and slip out the back door of this place. Go to the Y.W.C.A. for the night. I'll phone you tomorrow."

She looked at me reproachfully, and left the booth.

I stared after her as she walked away. It might be quite a while before I saw her again, I was thinking. She had a nice free swing to her stride, something gracious and proud in the way she carried herself.

"Yes?" a waiter grunted at me, striding to the booth.

"Two coffees, black and in a hurry," I said.

"Two blackouts," he yelled. "Blitz 'em!"

I took the piece of cardboard from my pocket—that cardboard which a hand had thrust through the hole in the frosted glass of Lucius' office door. I reread the penciled "*See what's pasted to the bottom of the third drawer on the left.*" The writing was in printed letters, not the writer's actual handwriting.

I thought a moment.

In my coat pocket I had a little first-aid kit, one of the samples that drug firms are constantly deluging upon doctors. From the kit I took the tiny vial of iodine. I poured several drops into a spoon from the table. Then I took

out my cigarette-lighter, lit it, set it upon the cloth. Close over the flame I held the spoon with the iodine. Taking that piece of cardboard with the words penciled on it, I rolled the paper into a cone. And as the iodine began to fume up, I held the paper cone close over the spoon.

Waiting, then, I listened. The jabber and clatter in the beanery drowned out most noises from the street. I didn't hear flatfeet pounding the sidewalks at a run, though somewhere a siren was buzzsawing traffic aside. All I could do, for the moment, was to sit tight.

I set the spoon down and unfolded my cone of cardboard.

My pulse leaped. My technique had been awfully crude, but the iodine fumes *had* brought out some latent fingerprints! I held the paper closer to the light bulb at the side of the booth—

My heart wedged violently into my throat. Somebody not in the waiter's white apron had stopped beside my booth.

"What've you got there, Roger?"

It was Daisymae. I sat limp as she slid back into her seat.

"I told you to get away—"

She patted my hand. "Darling, I love you and I honor you, but I *won't* obey you. What've you got there?"

I flattened the cardboard out on the table. She read the penciled words and recognized the card. Then she saw the fingerprints, and caught her breath.

"Whose are they? The man who tossed the card to us?"

"Uh-huh."

"Lucius, you think?"

"No. Lucius' fingers are broad and stubby. These prints are slim. I think I've seen 'em before."

"Where?"

"On the blade of that knife you took to Captain Michaelford."

Her gray eyes widened. "The man who stabbed Natalie?"

I nodded. "Ed Flinn."

"Then he was following us!" she gasped.

And I gasped, mentally, as another thought struck me: Maybe Natalie Middleigh's murderer was still following us?

Before, it had been merely a hunch I'd had that he was hunting me. Now he had become a threat that was grim and close.

"Roger, why should Flinn want to find your birth record?"

"He didn't. All he wanted was for us to open the safe—and be caught in the act by that night watchman!"

"Oh! Why, we d-darned near got shot. Nice people!" Her brow puckered. "Roger, isn't it strange that an ex-convict wanted by the police should know where Lucius hides the combination to his safe?"

"Maybe Flinn is working for Lucius," I thought aloud.

"Unclench your fist, Roger. Relax."

"I want to find my dear cousin Lucius, damn 'im!"

"Sure. In a minute. Here comes our coffee."

FROM my pocket I took the directory of phone-numbers which I'd snatched from Lucius' office.

"Going to ring those numbers and ask for Lucius?"

"No," I said. "I figure that he's holed up in some shady hotel, under a fake name. I'm going to visit some of these people he's got listed and ask questions."

"After midnight? Awkward time."

I winced. "But I *can* question his doctor, even this late."

"Doctors. What's singular about his doctor is that they're so plural."

"Don't go radio on me. Grab that telephone-book off the stand behind you. . . . Thanks."

Lucius had no doctors on his private list, but I was thinking of the doctors on his check-book stubs, to whom he'd sent sizable checks.

I kept thumbing the pages, but could find none of them.

"Damn! Not one of those doctors is listed."

"Maybe they're out-of-town doctors Lucius paid for writing testimonials on his *Vitaflex* compound?"

I nodded, but I felt uneasy. And I had reason to. The names on Lucius' check-stubs were not of out-of-town doctors at all. But it wasn't until later that I learned the grisly truth.

Daisymae asked thoughtfully: "Roger, do you think that there's any connection between Lucius and Ed Flinn?"

"Maybe they're working in cahoots."

"Or at cross-purposes, fighting each other?"

I sat up. "Maybe it *is* cross-purposes. Flinn's the man, I think, who held a gun on us and ordered Lucius to cross the border into Mexico."

"Which means that Lucius must know something about Ed Flinn that Flinn doesn't want exposed?"

"Right! And that's all the more reason why I've got to find Lucius. Come on. Let's get out of here."

"Where we going?"

"Hilarion Tongko's home!"

MY theory was that a servant in a household learns a lot about that household. In the phone-book I'd found a number and address for Tongko. Lucius' house-boy, apparently, had gone home, nights.

The address was in an outlying portion of town, and we took a taxi. That was risky, of course, but we had no choice. Daisymae moved close to me on the seat, and I put my arm about her shoulders.

"Tell me something, Roger?"

"Sure. What?"

"I've been thinking. Your father died, and—"

"Stepfather," I said automatically.

"No. *Father.*"

"Of course. It didn't—I mean, I sort of have to get used to the idea."

"His will left approximately half of his estate to Lucius, half to Mike, and cut you off with one dollar."

"That's right."

"But *was* it?"

"Well, why not?" I countered.

"Think about it, Roger! Did your father like Lucius so much more than he liked you?"

"He didn't like Lucius. If Lucius had been a pup, he'd have drowned him. He'd have drowned him anyhow, given half a chance. He always thought of Lucius as a Girl Scout with the vapors."

"And did he like Mike?"

"He hardly knew Mike. Considered him a harum-scarum."

"Yet he divided his estate between them, and left you nothing."

"All the more to spite me. I had walked out on him."

She shook her head. "There isn't much room in your heart for spite when you're dying."

"You don't know how he felt toward me."

"How *did* he feel toward you? Wait, now! Before you answer, remember that you were not his stepson, but actually his son."

"I'll try. Well—there was something strained between us. Just what, I didn't know, but I felt it in him. As if he'd been unforgivably hurt. It had made him crusty and hard. At the same time, I *was* his son, and—"

"At times he was pretty nice to you?"

"Damned nice, at times. I had the best bike on the block. I had a pinto pony, too. I went to swell summer camps. And he did want me to take over his big junk business. But I wanted to be a doctor. He acted as if I were a traitor by having such notions."

"Could he have known, then, that he was a pretty sick man?"

"I hadn't thought of that. Maybe he did know—"

"And he wanted you by him."

"Then why didn't he tell me?"

"He was as sensitive as only a lonely, heartsick old man can be."

"All right, I was a heel."

"No. You were sensitive and proud too."

"Where does that get us?"

She sighed and kissed me placatingly on the chin.

OUR taxi pulled to the curb. It was a two-story house: a tin-shop below and an apartment above. The place was dark, except for a light at the back.

The hackie looked curiously at me as I paid him. This was an odd address for a couple of well-dressed people to come to. He drove off, and we walked to the foot of the enclosed stairway, and I pushed the bell. We heard it ringing upstairs, but the latch didn't buzz, and nobody called down to us. Nobody home, I realized, with a gone feeling in my stomach.

A car came up the street. I drew Daisymae into the stairway entrance with me until the car should pass. But it didn't pass. Abruptly it stopped at the curb, and a flashlight beam shone into the stairway entrance. Full upon us! I felt a giddy swirl of panic. *That was a police prowler car.* And we were caught, for we couldn't go upstairs through the locked door—and a cop already was climbing out of the car headed toward us. We were caught as securely as bug specimens impaled in a rack!

"This is the place. Bring Tongko," the cop said.

A second cop climbed out of the car, hauling a third man by the arm—a slim, slight, youngish man—a Filipino. "All right, Rafael," the second cop said gruffly. "Come on."

Daisymae's fingers had tightened convulsively on my arm. I whispered: "Let me do the talking." And I drew her out onto the sidewalk.

The brawny cop held that flashlight full on us. I said: "Officer, mind lowering that? We're looking for Rafael Tongko."

"Who're you? What do you want with Tongko?"

"I come from Hilarion Tongko's employer. We just heard about the accident."

"Oh! Glad you stopped by to see the kid." There was relief and gruff sympathy in the big cop's voice. "I found Rafael sitting on the curb by the drugstore around the corner, in a crying jag. I thought he was drunk, and h'isted 'im to his feet and told him to git along home, and he hauled off and pasted me one. I was going to take him down to Night Court, but the druggist come runnin' out, and—" The cop lowered his voice out of clumsy but good-hearted feeling for the kid. "He told me that he'd called Rafael to the phone on 'count of the hospital wantin' him. It was about the kid's brother. Killed in a car wreck, like you know. They told it to Rafael just like that, and the kid stumbled out of the drugstore and dropped down on the curb—"

"Good Lord!" I whispered. "We came to ease the news to him."

"Rafael," the cop said, turning, "here's some friends of your brother's. We'll leave you with 'em. Uh—take it easy, son."

The cops rather hurried off, as if relieved.

Young Rafael didn't look at us. Head bent, he fumbled at the door with a key. He was trying to choke back sobs, trying awfully hard. But when he got the door open, he switched a light on and stepped back and said in good English: "Please come in." His voice was sensitive and anguished, but controlled.

"Thank you, Rafael," Daisymae said.

We walked upstairs, into a tiny apartment, very bare but exceedingly neat and decent. Rafael asked us to sit down.

He was a clean-cut youngster in his early twenties, a little gaunt and drawn from hard work, his dark eyes direct and intelligent.

I said: "I saw that wreck in which your brother was killed. We—offer our deepest sympathy, Rafael."

Just a hint of a spasm of heartbroken feeling did his lean face betray.

I guessed: "Your brother was putting you through school?"

"Yes. I'm an engineer. I'm taking special graduate work in irrigation problems, at the University."

"Tell me—I'm asking this in all friendliness, Rafael—did your brother often borrow Mr. Midleigh's car?"

"Never!"

"How can you be so positive?"

"Because my brother never learned to drive at all."

"Then he couldn't have been driving the car when it was wrecked. Is there any reason for anybody to want to murder your brother?"

He stared at me. "Why, no."

I said: "Your brother didn't die in the car wreck. He was already dead when the car rolled off the bank. I'm a doctor. A trained man can read indications. Flow of blood, or lack of it, for instance. Your brother was killed before the collision—his skull fractured, with something like the butt of a gun. I'm sorry, but I've got to give it to you straight, because you ought to know. Maybe you can help bring the criminal to justice."

He caught a shuddery breath. But he didn't wilt.

I asked: "Did Hilarion like his job with the Midleighs?"

"He hated it!"

"Why? Because it was menial?"

Rafael bit his lip. "You see, my brother and I—I mean, we come of good people. My father was a Christian missionary in Mindanao. Hilarion did not hate his job—but the Midleigh house was unpleasant to be in. Mr. Midleigh and his wife quarreled. He tried hard to please her, but the more he tried, the less she liked it. He's a mild man, and she was—*strong*, you understand? She drove him. She made demands. She said she was going to divorce him. Hilarion said that he begged her not to. Brother said there was another man. He was not insinuating anything, please understand! Simply that Mrs. Midleigh planned to get a divorce and marry another man."

"Do you know who the other man was?"

"Only that his last name was McReady."

"Could Hilarion have found out something about him and Mrs. Midleigh, and was killed by them, to shut his mouth?"

Rafael shook his head.

"No. Brother said that they were very careful. They wanted to get big alimony from Mr. Midleigh. Brother considered them very, very ignoble people," Rafael said earnestly.

"And brother," said Daisymae, "was very, very right."

Me, I thought back three years, to that cruise on which I'd become so chummy with Natalie Midleigh—who'd called herself Miss Thorpe then, though she'd been married to Lucius for some years. Natalie had sought me out on that cruise. Why? How had I fitted into her plans?

"Well, we'll have to go," I said, rising. "My deepest sympathy, Rafael. Your brother was a fine man."

We shook hands with him, and turned to go. He didn't speak—afraid, now, that he'd let his grief spill over.

"WE'VE come full circle again," I said to Daisymae as we went down the dark stairs. "Back to Lucius. Now it looks as if Natalie told Lucius she was going to leave him, but definitely—and Lucius, beside himself, stabbed her."

"Then Ed Flinn took the murder weapon, wiped Lucius' fingerprints off the handle, and proceeded to dispose of it?" "And accidentally left his own fingerprints on the blade."

"And *why* should Ed Flinn—a confidence-man, and an ex-convict now being hunted by the police—do all this for Lucius?"

"That's something we'll ask Lucius."

"If we ever find him!"

"We'll find him," I said stubbornly.
 "Roger, darling—" *"Don't call me that,"* I said peevishly. "You show people are awfully free with endearments. I'm literal, and I don't like that kind of language unless it's meant."
 "All right, darling."
 "Well? What were you going to say?"
 She sighed. "Roger, what is your specialty as a doctor? It isn't diagnosis, is it?"
 "No. What in the world has that to do—" *"What is your specialty?"*
 "After all, I'm not such an *old* doctor! I think, in time," I said rather stiffly, "I'll make a damn' good surgeon."
 "I'm sure you will!"
 "What've you been driving at?"
 "Roger, let's get back to thinking about your father. Had he any friends in town who knew him intimately?"
 "His physician—Dr. Steuben."
 "A doctor's used to night calls. Let's go see him!"
 "It happens that Steuben's a hell of a good egg, so—" *"Come on!"*

At the bottom of the stairway I took a long look each way down the street. I saw no prowling cars at all.

We started walking toward North Broadway. And as we walked, the events of the night gathered like thunderheads in dark and ominous storm, filling my mind with turmoil again. I'd killed a man. *I'd killed a man.* Oh, I'd stood next to death often enough, professionally. I've had my share of incurables as patients, and my quota of unpredictables: Of women going into eclampsia during delivery, of the rare man with a flaring allergy against some ordinary antitoxin. But this was different. Not with a surgical instrument but with a tool designed for death had I killed Nolane. In violence had I taken a life.

I didn't see the curb at all, and I stumbled and likely would have sprawled flat if Daisymae hadn't caught me. Something wrenched loose in me then. Her arms tightened around me, and she held me as I shook and tried to make sobs into words of anger.

CHAPTER TEN



At the corner of Broadway we found a taxi at the curb. The driver was slumped in his seat, listening to a late news-broadcast from his radio. We got into the cab, and I gave him Dr. Steuben's address in one of the suburbs.

He nodded, yawning as he started his motor. I put my arm about Daisymae's slim shoulders and she pressed my hand.

"What're you going to ask Dr. Steuben?"
 "Questions about your mother and father, Roger."
 "That necessary?"
 "It's vital."

I didn't say anything for a while; just sat there, brooding. All of a sudden I realized that the hackie was slowing down, was pulling over to the curb, was stopping. I leaned forward.

"Driver, this isn't our street."

He pointed ahead. Near the corner, a bright globe lighted a doorway; and on the globe was the word *Police*. "You got ten bucks?" said the hackie.

"Why, you—"

Daisymae pulled me back as I started forward.

"Give him twenty," she whispered.

"But it's a shakedown!"

"Pay him."

So I did; I gave him two tens, fighting back my rage.

"Thanks," he said, and chuckled. "It was just a guess," he said. "Now we'll make time!"

He slammed forward so fast I was flung back on the seat. "Don't swear, Red," Daisymae said; and *she* chuckled.

We pulled up in front of Dr. Steuben's gracious old house on the hilltop.

"This is on me," the hackie said as I stuck my hand into my pocket. "And I can't tell the cops nothin' till I've slept off the whisky your dough's gonna buy me."

"Thanks, pal." We were both grinning as he pulled away.

Daisymae and I walked to the front door of the house. I pushed the bell-button.

Dr. Steuben himself came to the door. He was a small, slight, white-haired man with shrewd, cajoling eyes and a gray mustache over humorous lips. He opened the door and peered at us over the thick lenses of his spectacles.

"Come in, Roger," he said, as casually as if he'd lunched with me the day before.

We entered, and I introduced Daisymae to him. He held her hand and looked long at her, frankly enjoying her good looks.

"A fine pair, you two," he said. "By rights, I ought to handcuff you to a newel post and call Captain Michaelford. Only, I know that a finer youngster than Roger never lived," he said to Daisymae. "You going to marry him?"

"Oh, sure," she said.

"Fine, fine! I'll deliver your kids free, if you'll promise to have four of 'em."

"Five," said Daisymae. "I like 'em a little odd."

"Aint that dandy," I rasped. "Maybe I don't want—"

"Shut up, Roger. You let Daisymae do the thinking. Come into my study. I got some brandy that'll put a soul into you, and I want to read you a chapter of the book I'm writing."

"Doc, we haven't time—"

"You've got lots of time. You'll spend the night here."

"You don't know what I'm up against—"

"I do so. I listen to the news-broadcasts."

Daisymae said: "We need some information, Dr. Steuben."

He looked at her and nodded, and proceeded to pour some rare old brandy into glasses.

"What sort of information, Miss Laurens?"

"We've found out that Roger was not Mr. Midleigh's stepson, but his own son."

Dr. Steuben nodded, and held his brandy to the light.

"I can swear to that. I brought Roger into the world."

"Why did Roger's father let him believe he was a stepson?"

Dr. Steuben's face became very serious.

"It's one of those things you can't understand without fully knowing the personalities involved."

"Do explain."

"First of all, Roger's father, Jerrold Midleigh, was a difficult person: An introvert, with a decided organic deficiency—infantile paralysis had left him lame—and a trace of paranoia, to give you just an idea. A rather impossible person, to tell you the truth. Suspicious and cantankerous, even when a young man—and he was over forty when he married Roger's mother.

"The marriage lasted six months. Roger's mother left Jerrold. Ran away—literally. She was pregnant at the time, but she didn't know it, and he didn't know it.

"Nor did she tell him, when she found it out.

"She went to San Francisco. She had a few hundred dollars. There a boy she'd known since high-school days wanted her to get a divorce and marry him. Lathburn, his name was. She put him off. She waited until you were born, Roger. I went up there to attend her. When she was up and around, she started divorce proceedings. Then she married Roger Lathburn—for whom, incidentally, she had named you.

"She was pretty happy for a half-dozen years. Then Lathburn died of pneumonia, and your mother had to go to work.

"Jerrold Midleigh really loved her. When he heard that her second husband had died, Jerrold came to San Fran-

cisco and asked your mother to remarry him. He accepted you as Roger Lathburn's son.

"Well, your mother knew she couldn't bear up under the drudgery of her existence. And she wanted advantages for you. So she remarried Jerrold. But she did *not* tell him that you were his own son. She wanted you to feel no deep tie to Jerrold. She wanted you to feel free to break with him whenever you found him impossible to get along with. Our modern psycho-analysts could find a lot of explanations for her stubbornness about the matter, but we don't need to go into it.

"Well, she tried hard to make a good job of her remarriage, and she succeeded. Jerrold was happy. Your mother wasn't. Jerrold was a crabbed, unreasonable man. Even his feelings toward you were mixed, Roger. He both liked you for being a sunny kid who brought life into the house—and resented you for being the son of his wife's dead husband. And *that*, I'd say, is the key to his treatment of you.

"Well, your mother died when you were ten. It hit Jerrold hard.

"He grew to depend on you. He still didn't know you were his own son. When he came to me feeling kind of bad, and I discovered that he had a heart condition that would grow increasingly serious, why, then I told him that you were his own son. Even when I got him a birth-certificate, he was reluctant to believe it. You were twenty years old by that time.

"Well, he didn't seem to change much outwardly. You didn't notice any increasing kindness in him, I'll bet. But he did grow to lean on you in his moody way.

"Then you took the bit in your teeth and walked out on him. That's the expression he used. *You walked out on him*. Believe it or not, he was hurt—angry, and deeply hurt. And he said he'd see himself cut in two before he'd make an overture to you. The first approach had to come from you, Roger."

"And I didn't make any."

"No, you were gallivanting round the world, not letting on you cared a hoot whether Jerrold lived or died, and Jerrold was slowly dying."

"Even so," Daisymae put in, "do you think that Jerrold Midleigh cared more for his two nephews, Mike Norredge and Lucius Midleigh, than he cared for Roger?"

"Of course not!"

"Then do you think it reasonable that Jerrold would leave all his estate to Mike and Lucius, and leave Roger nothing?"

"What are you driving at?" I demanded of her.

"Just this," she said, looking at me. "Roger, there's a reason for everything that Lucius has done to you and tried to do to you this past day and night. And that reason is: he has gypped you out of an inheritance."

I just stared at her.

She went on: "When it all comes out in the wash, you're going to discover that this quarter-million dollars in gold that Lucius has hoarded was supposed to have been turned into cash and handed over to you as soon as you were around to receive it!"

"Good Lord!" I choked.

Dr. Steuben chuckled—leaned forward and patted Daisymae on the knee. "Good girl! You've got brains."

"But what proof have you?" I practically yelled.

Daisymae shrugged and sat back. "With a quarter-million dollars at stake, maybe you'll hustle around and collect your own proof, Roger, darling."

"Oh, sure, swell!" I grated. "When I'm put on trial for murdering that Treasury man, and I reveal that the hoarded gold he caught me in the act of unearthing was *my own property*—that'll do me a lot of good, won't it? It'll put me in the gas chamber so fast—"

"Now, now," Dr. Steuben put in soothingly. "It's too late at night for any high-powered cerebration. I suggest bed. Preceded by a nightcap, of course."

He poured it, and we lifted it, with me trying to be calm. "Here's to riches!" said Daisymae, and I almost choked on my drink.

Dr. Steuben led us to our bedrooms then.

They were nice rooms, with a door between. First he ushered Daisymae into the south room. He turned the key in that connecting door rather ostentatiously, and thrust the key into Daisymae's hand, and gave her a wink. She winked right back at him.

"Your room's in here, Roger," he said then, and led me to the adjoining room. "Pleasant dreams," he said, and chuckled.

But it was a relief to get out of my clothes and into pajamas I found in the clothes closet. I was so tired that, I realized, I actually *might* sleep if I could once clear the crazy, swirling tumult of misgivings from my mind.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



HE idea came to me just as I woke with the sun beating on my eyes. I'd actually slept, out of sheer fatigue. I lay there turning over the idea in my mind, realizing that it was risky, but realizing too that the alternative was even worse.

The hall door opened, and Daisymae stuck her head in. She was brushing her hair, and it shone in the sunlight with bronzy sparkles. There was just the hint of shadow under her gray eyes; otherwise she looked carefree and radiant.

"Get up, darling. Dr. Steuben is cooking sausage and scrambled eggs for us."

"The condemned man ate a hearty breakfast," I muttered.

She laughed and blew me a kiss and shut the door.

I did eat some breakfast—and two cups of coffee. Then I sat back and studied my misgivings like a losing poker hand.

"Doctor, I could use some counsel," I said.

Dr. Steuben nodded.

I said: "I see two alternatives. I could run—I could maybe make it across the border into Mexico. On the other hand, I could stay and make a last desperate try to clear myself."

Very seriously Dr. Steuben said: "You're not the type to run. You'd *feel* guilty, if you did. You'd feel dirty. You'd suffer as much as if you were in prison for life."

And Daisymae asked: "What is this last, desperate try to clear yourself that you're thinking of?"

"I'll tell you the details later. Dr. Steuben, will you drive us to Mike Norredge's radio station? I'm leery of taking a cab."

Daisymae touched my arm. "I hope you know what you're doing, Roger?" she said softly. . . .

Of course, a cop was waiting at the radio station.

I hadn't foreseen that. We walked into the station—and a husky man in plain-clothes looked at us, got up from his chair in the front office and came for us straight.

"Dr. Lathburn?" he began.

"Call Captain Michaelford," I snapped at him, heading him off.

"Do that, McElvy," Dr. Steuben said. "I'll be responsible."

The cop came on into the inner office with us.

We walked into a minor tornado of activity. Mike was here, his lean young face burning with excitement. And his whole original acting cast was assembled for rehearsal!

He stiffened in shocked surprise at sight of us, with the cop.

"Will you people go into the sound stage?" he asked the cast. "Go right ahead with rehearsal." And he walked to meet us.

"Mike," Daisymae said. "You've got your actors back!"

"Uh-huh. An outfit organizing a new network has been wanting to buy me out. For my license and wave-length. I borrowed some money off them. Put up the place as security. So if my 'Sensation Hour' program goes over to-night, and Ben Surgent signs a contract, I'm all set and everything's just dandy. But if the show is a flop—I'll be out on the street, broke."

"Don't worry! Your show'll go over big, Mikel!"

"Daisymael!" Mike was suddenly all business again. "Call the Surgent Plastics Company, will you? Ask for Mr. Ben Surgent, and tell him I want him to come over and watch rehearsal. I got to sell that guy!"

"What's the phone number?"

"Look in the book. I'll be in the other—"

"Mikel!" I grabbed his elbow. "I need your help."

"I'm awful busy—but of course, Roger—"

I drew him into a corner and whispered to him. At the big desk, the plain-clothes man was talking into one telephone and Daisymae was asking for, "Information, please," in the other.

When I finished my explanation, Mike rubbed his lean jaw dubiously, but his eyes were afire with the possibilities he saw in my plan. "Do me more good than it'll likely do do you," he cautioned. "You're set on it, Roger?"

"It's my only hope."

"Okay, pal. We'll do it in eleven minutes, when I got a news-broadcast scheduled."

I grabbed paper and pencil on the desk and got busy sorting out sentences of the broadcast I was going to make, and Mike busied himself writing out an announcement. While we were at it, Ben Surgent was ushered in by Izzy.

Mike jumped to his feet, all smiles and personality.

"Hello, Mr. Surgent! Awfully glad you happened to drop in—"

"Happened, hell! I got to have radio time, I got to have the dinner hour; and I got to know if your program'll sell plastics."

"You can bank on it! If you'll just—"

"Sell plastics, I said. Not sink 'em."

"The cast for 'Sensation Hour' is in the auditorium," Mike said. "Wouldn't you like to watch the rehearsal?"

"Damn' right. I got to see what I'm buying."

"I'll show you the way," Daisymae said, rising.

He did have enough politeness to open the door for her, though, into the auditorium. Mike turned to me.

"Let's go into the monitor booth. Two minutes. You all set, Roger?" he asked, and looked intently at me.

I nodded. My mouth felt parched, and I licked my lips.

"I've never been on the air before."

"That's all right. Talk in a low, natural tone."

BUT we didn't get into the sound-booth uninterrupted. Izzy came dashing in from the reception-room, wild-eyed. Before he could explain, we saw burly Captain Michaelford and another man of the Homicide Bureau following Izzy. They stalked into the big office. Michaelford's craggy face was grim.

"All right, Dr. Lathburn. I've got men front and back of this place. You're coming along quietly, or—"

"Be glad to," I cut in on him crisply. "But if a little patience on your part will prevent a miscarriage of justice, that's certainly not too much for me to ask, is it?"

"What do you want?" Michaelford asked heavily.

"I want you to wait while I make a short broadcast. You can come right into the booth with us, and hold a gun against my back if you want to."

"All right. I'll do that. All except the gun."

We crowded into the announcer's booth.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Mike began, his clear resonant voice very serious, "beside me in the studio here is a man whose name you all have probably seen in rather sensational news, this past twenty-four hours. He is Dr. Roger Lathburn. At his side is Captain Michaelford, of the Homicide Bureau.

"As you all know, Dr. Roger Lathburn is charged with murder. Not with one murder, but with two. Dr. Lathburn claims that he is completely innocent. But, to establish his innocence, he needs help. Your help, ladies and gentlemen. Helpless to aid himself, baffled by the net of circumstance in which he is enmeshed, in all frankness and honesty he will tell you his story and ask for your aid. Here is Dr. Lathburn!"

He stepped aside and I moved over in front of the mike.

IT took me a gulping moment to get started. I said: "Friends, I'm a doctor. Just an ordinary young doctor whose experience has been on cruise-boats. Yesterday morning I came home for the first time in a number of years. Since I'd left, my—father had died. We had been estranged, and though he had been a moderately wealthy man, he had left me nothing.

"At least, that's what I thought.

"Yesterday morning, on arriving in town, I hired a car and drove to the home of my cousin, who had married since I'd gone, and who had moved into my father's house. This cousin's name is Lucius Midleigh. Please remember that name: *Lucius Midleigh*.

"When I arrived at his house, I rang the doorbell. Nobody came to let me in. I walked in finally. I found nobody home. But when I returned to my car to drive away, a young woman was sitting there, and she was critically wounded. I did not know who she was, did not recognize her. She told me to drive her to this radio station. She had a gun in her hand. I asked her who had stabbed her, but already she was too far gone to answer. I rushed her to a hospital, but she died on the way.

"Friends, I had *not* stabbed her. Here is what happened:

"When my father died, he and I were estranged. Before that, he had cut me out of his will. However, since my departure he had occasion to convert some of his holdings into cash, and the cash into gold coin, which he kept in a safe-deposit box unknown to anybody but himself.

"Before he died, he requested my cousin Lucius Midleigh—whom he made executor of the estate—to convert the gold into legal tender and hold the money in trust for me, to be given me when I returned home. Actually, my father did not know my whereabouts. Even if he had, he was too proud and hurt by my treatment of him to make the first overture of reconciliation between us. The young never know how their self-centeredness seems like arrogance and indifference to older folks who love them.

"Well, Lucius Midleigh made no effort to inform me of the money left me. On the contrary; for he and his wife determined to keep the quarter-million dollars, rightfully mine, for themselves.

"But they tried to play safe. They tried to find out if I had any inkling of the money left me.

"Some three years ago Mrs. Midleigh took a trip on the cruise-boat on which I was physician. She called herself Miss Thorpe. Note that—Miss Thorpe. She sought me out, and became friendly with me. To question me.

"And she discovered that I knew absolutely nothing of the money left for me by my father.

"In the meantime, they had not turned the gold coin over to the Treasury for legal tender. If they had done so, it would have become a matter of record that Lucius Midleigh had a quarter-million in cash from my father's estate. And since that sum was not provided for in the will, it would have come to me as next of kin. . . . So Lucius Midleigh smuggled the gold coin into a secret hiding-place; and waited for a time and way to convert it into money he could safely use and keep.

"The night before I came to see Lucius, I phoned him that I was coming. . . . That must have frightened him. I believe that then and there he was ready to abandon the whole scheme.

"But his wife wouldn't have it. She was the one with courage and daring. And *she—wanted—money!*

"It seems evident that yesterday morning, while waiting for me, they quarreled. Perhaps he said he was going to tell me everything. Likely she called him a fool and a coward—and told him she was going to leave him.

"As we reconstruct the scene, Lucius grabbed up a letter-opener—and stabbed his wife. That wasn't all Lucius did. The Midleighs had a Filipino house-boy. He saw the stabbing. So Lucius silenced that witness, with—well, let's call it a 'blunt instrument.'"

I had to stop for an instant and sort of catch my breath. In the booth with me, Mike and Captain Michaelford stood very still and taut. Then I went on:

"Then Lucius had to think of protecting himself.

"I would be a natural fall guy for the murder, he decided. Thinking about it, he picked up from the floor a string of pearls his wife had been wearing, and which had broken in the struggle with her. The doorbell rang. Looking out, he saw it was Mike Norredge, who had said he'd stop by for those pearls. He put them in an envelope, went to the door and handed the envelope to Mr. Norredge—and said his wife was in bed.

"Mr. Norredge left—and Lucius got to work.

"He telephoned a friend, and told that friend that I had called him and threatened to kill him, and he begged that friend for help. The friend said he would send police over at once. Then Lucius went to his wife's room and took some snapshots which she'd had taken three years ago—aboard that cruise-boat, when she had been friendly with me, as I've explained before. Lucius left those snapshots showing me standing with my arm around his wife, where the police would find them. Then Lucius left the house. He took the murder weapon with him, and gave it to a friend to dispose of.

"You see how I had been framed? That phone call, those snapshots—they pinned the murder on me!

"Lucius then went to our other cousin, Mr. Mike Norredge, confessed to him that he had been hoarding gold coin which belonged to the estate, and asked for help. For he just didn't know *what* to do about that gold.

"Well, I came to Mike Norredge's radio station. Lucius came. When he was informed of his wife's death, Lucius acted as if he was inwardly shattered. But it wasn't thought of his wife that was tearing him apart—it was fear that he hadn't framed me strongly enough for the murder. So, later that day, Lucius tried to kill me in an auto wreck. It didn't work. So Lucius waited till nightfall, and tried a scheme that *did* work—

"He realized that I must suspect him, and that I would try to catch him, and that I'd go to his home to search for evidence against him. Well, Lucius had concealed the gold he was hoarding in a hiding-place which I had shown him long ago, when we were kids . . . so Lucius called a Treasury officer, who had been on the trail of gold payments made to my father, and told this officer—a Mr. Nolane—to come to Lucius' house and watch for me. So, when I went there and searched the house, both Lucius and this Federal officer were there. And when I found the gold Lucius had hidden, they started shooting.

"I was—well, excited and—sort of frantic. I tried to get away. And when Lucius suddenly appeared in my way, a gun in his hand, I shot in self-defense. . . . Only, when I'd quit shooting, I discovered that it wasn't Lucius whom I'd shot, but Mr. Nolane.

"Friends, I'm willing to take any punishment that the law decides is due me. But I want to clear myself of any criminal intention; and for that I need your help. Lucius Midleigh must be found and taken into custody.

"So I'm appealing to taxi-drivers, to elevator-operators, to bell-hops in hotels, to clerks in stores and to waiters in restaurants and to newsboys and streetcar conductors. If any of you have seen Lucius Midleigh last night or today—please notify the police, or call Station KRO!

"Lucius Midleigh is thirty-six years old, but looks over forty. He weighs about one hundred eighty-five pounds,

though he's only five feet seven inches tall. When I saw him last, he was wearing a suit of pin-striped blue, double-breasted, and a gray felt hat. His face is fleshy, with deep creases about the mouth. His hair is a mousy brown and he has a large bald spot, and tries to cover it by combing his hair over it. His eyes are gray and protuberant. Friends, this is what I'm asking, begging of you—

"Think back. *Have you seen Lucius Midleigh? If you have, phone in at once!*"

I stepped back from the mike. I'd shot my bolt. There was nothing more I could do.

Mike took my place, to give the station identification, and the station phone-number.

I walked out into the main office, Captain Michaelford beside me. He put his hand on my arm, and the gesture was sympathetic.

"That was a good try, Doc."

Daisymae came straight to me, took my hand.

That was all. Nobody said anything. Something taut and embarrassed held the group. Overly sensitive, my thought was: "They're sorry for me. But they know it's hopeless. I just made a spectacle of myself and nothing's going to come of it!"

I jumped violently when a telephone shrilled.

"Already!" Daisymae exclaimed, her face lighting up.

Captain Michaelford grabbed up the phone. "Yeah?"

HE listened; we all listened so intently that the voice in the phone was an audible rasp.

"Say, I saw this Lucius Midleigh you're huntin' for! I went to a Turkish bath last night, see? And this guy Midleigh, he's in there, showing off. He's got a job as the World's Most Tattooed Man in a joint on Main Street—"

Captain Michaelford cut in curtly on that excited voice.

"Sorry, pal, but you got the wrong guy."

Somebody laughed nervously. I heard Daisymae whisper, "Oh, Lord," with a catch of breath.

But already the other phone was peeling out and I grabbed it up. "Station KRO."

"Say, Mister, I can give you a line on this Midleigh guy you're huntin'! He's a deaf-mute who trains dogs at the track out on—"

"Wrong guy, pal," I said. "Thanks, anyway."

I hung up, and this time that sigh seemed to go round the room. My hands were shaking with reaction.

I let Captain Michaelford take the phone when the bell pealed again. And again, everybody being so quiet and rigid with suspense, we could hear the voice on the wire: "This is the Kelly-Randford Detective Agency. For a hundred-dollar retainer we guarantee to find this Midleigh chap for you. Our work is recommended by—"

"Oh, go to hell, Shamus," Captain Michaelford said wearily, which showed how the strain was stabbing into even his iron calm.

For a while, then, we stood there, waiting. And despair was an icy tightness about my heart.

When the phone did ring again Daisymae grabbed it. "Yes?"

She listened a moment, and her sweet face tautened with something like the beginning of hope.

"It's a policeman. Officer Gingrich. He's out on Waverly Drive, near the Midleigh home, he says." Her voice rose a little:

"He wants to know: 'Is that Midleigh guy an Elk?'"

"Yes," I put in. "He wore a big emblem!"

"Gingrich asks, 'Has he got smallpox scars on his face?'"

"They're not smallpox scars," I blurted. "They're scars from birdshot—he once got some glancing birdshot in his face!"

She relayed that, her voice trembling; and the rest of us crowded close, breath held, almost our very heartbeats stopped, so that we heard the voice in the phone.

Gingrich asked, "And does Midleigh wear a wedding ring of Roman gold with some kind of flowers engraved—"

"Orange blossoms!" I burst out. "You've found him!" I shouted, bending toward the phone. "Where've you got 'im? Bring 'im in, Gingrich! Don't let 'im get away!" And the cop answered: "He won't get away. He's lyin' here in a ditch with the top of his head bashed in. He's been dead at least ten hours!"

Captain Michaelford took hold of my arm to help me to my feet. I didn't remember sitting down at all.

"Come on, Doctor."

"Wait!" Daisymae said. "We're not finished yet!"

"Captain Michaelford, I was with Roger last night. He didn't kill Lucius Midleigh any more than he killed Natalie or Hilarion Tongko. Somebody else did those murders. You want to catch that somebody else, don't you?"

"What've you got on your mind?"

"There's somebody else who's been lurking in the background of this case all the time. Remember, Roger mentioned that after Lucius stabbed Natalie, he gave the murder weapon to a friend to dispose of? Well, Roger just *guessed* that Lucius stabbed Natalie. But we know for sure that somebody else handled the murder weapon, because that somebody else's fingerprints were on the knife. You remember, Captain! I brought the knife to you. And the fingerprints we found on it belong to a man named Ed Flinn."

"So how do you fit Ed Flinn into this thing?"

"Here's how: Roger and I went to Lucius' office. We looked through his account books. On his check-stubs, we found regular sums of money listed as paid out to doctors. Every month he paid \$250 to a doctor. Not the same doctor, mind you, but to a different physician every month."

"But he was the kind of guy who's always complaining of a bad heart or a trick stomach."

"Yes, but he wasn't indulging his neurasthenia to the extent of that much money. Captain Michaelford, Roger and I tried to find those doctors to whom Lucius paid money. We couldn't. They're not in the phone-book—"

"Out-of-town physicians."

"And they're not in the medical directories. *Because they don't exist at all!*"

She paused a moment, to let the fact sink in. Me, I stared at her, my pulse suddenly pounding. Maybe I'm not a brilliant diagnostician, but I know a goiter or a broken bone when I see it! And I was seeing what she was driving at!

"So?" prompted Michaelford.

"Blackmail," Daisymae said. "That was the relationship between Lucius Midleigh and Ed Flinn. Plain, ordinary blackmail."

"Of course," I blurted. "Lucius masked his payments to Ed Flinn by putting 'em down as payments to doctors!"

IT was so obvious a conclusion, and I made it with such an excited air of discovery that the group around us tittered.

"And why," demanded Michaelford, driving somberly straight to the point, "was Lucius Midleigh paying off to Flinn?"

"You know why," Daisymae retorted. "Ed Flinn had found out that Lucius was hoarding gold coin."

"If Lucius paid blackmail to Flinn—you still don't explain why Lucius stabbed his wife."

"Lucius didn't stab his wife. Ed Flinn stabbed Natalie. And Ed Flinn—who knew about Roger from Lucius—tried to frame the murder on Roger."

"You figure that Flinn killed Hilarion Tongko too?"

"Yes! Hilarion saw the first stabbing. Then Flinn, after framing the first murder on Roger, tried to kill Roger in a car wreck, so that the case would seem closed, and Roger would have no chance to prove he *hadn't* stabbed Natalie."

"Why, if you're right, did Ed Flinn stab Mrs. Midleigh?"

"Why don't you ask *him*?" Daisymae said.

That was like an electric shock in the room. Slowly Captain Michaelford's face reddened.

"Games, we're playing!" he sneered.

"Captain Michaelford, would you know Ed Flinn by sight?"

"No. I sent for identification photos, but they haven't arrived."

"Captain," Daisymae said tightly, urgently, "this is no game I'm playing. Ed Flinn is right in this room."

We'd expected that, from her previous question; and still it was a shock of surprise. None of us moved. It was as if we stood, we breathed and lived, in a fragile atmosphere of disaster—as if a move or a glance or even a rash thought would shatter everything about us.

SLOWLY, in his calm, heavy way Michaelford lifted his head and glanced around; and it was as if only he, out of his long experience and hardened familiarity with danger could safely do that. His dark eyes moved from Mike and me to little Will Randle to Cecily Wayne and Ben Surgent and Izzy and the actors, then back to Daisymae again.

"Do you know what you're talking about?"

"Three sets of fingerprints I'm talking about," Daisymae said. "First, a set of prints on the knife that killed Natalie Midleigh. Then a set of prints on a card which somebody threw to Roger and me when we were looking through Lucius' office. Thirdly, a set of fingerprints on this slick-paper brochure in my hand. Three sets of fingerprints—and *all identical!*"

"All Ed Flinn's?"

"Yes!"

"But this Ed Flinn you're talking about," Ben Surgent asked, leaning forward. "How do you figure he ever found out that Lucius Midleigh was hoarding gold?"

"You tell us, Mr. Surgent. *You're Ed Flinn!*"

He had leaned forward, Ben Surgent, as if to ask Daisymae that question—but one swift step, now, brought him behind her, and now he was facing us, with Daisymae as a shield between us, and in Ben Surgent's hand was an automatic.

"Nobody move, nobody talk!" he commanded.

Captain Michaelford slowly shook his head and started moving.

"It's no use, Flinn. I've got men all around the building."

"I'll shoot, Michaelford!"

I started moving, too.

"You won't get us both," I said.

"But I'll get her!" he said, and thrust the gun at the back of Daisymae's neck.

I stopped in my tracks. Michaelford stopped.

At the touch of that cold metal to the back of her neck, Daisymae fainted dead away—slumped forward out of her chair.

Flinn made a wild grab to catch her—and I flung myself in a headlong dive across the desk at him.

Fast as I was, Michaelford's bullet was faster. Flinn jerked up his arm to bring his automatic crashing down onto my skull. Hulking and slow as Michaelford looked, yet just that moment of time was all he needed to draw the gun he was so tensed to go after. His pistol roared and Flinn staggered, and then I'd rammed into him, and down we went to the floor in a threshing wrestle.

He flung me off. He lurched erect as Michaelford lumbered forward. There was blood on his side; but he had the vitality to plow ahead, to dive for the door. He knocked a chair and the typist's desk aside, and in spite of Michaelford's warning, "Stop, Flinn! I'll let you have it again!" he went on.

Again Captain Michaelford's gun roared in the room. And this time Flinn sprawled flat onto the rug, right at the door—as it opened and one of Michaelford's Homicide detail charged in, a gun in his fist.

"All right," Flinn said through gritted teeth. "I'm stay-in'."

I hurried back to look at Daisymae. But already she was coming out of that faint, and Mike and Cecily were helping her onto a chair. She smiled wanly at me.

"Sit back," I said anxiously. "I'll get you a drink—"

"But I'm fine, Roger. Just a little giddy."

I put my arm about her shoulders and she leaned her cheek against my hand. She was shaking with reaction.

Mike didn't notice us at all. Mike was staring at Ed Flinn, the fake Mr. Ben Surgent; and Mike's face was sick and livid with frustration. It was Izzy who had words for their let-down.

"Our sponsor," he wailed. "God almighty, you've shot our sponsor!"

I made a quick examination of Ben Surgent's wounds.

Meanwhile, Captain Michaelford demanded, a bit testily, of Daisymae: "What made you suspect Ben Surgent, anyhow?"

She said, "I realized that Surgent was a phony when I tried to find the *Surgent Plastics Corporation* in the telephone book. It wasn't listed. And information said they had no number for such a firm. So I handed Surgent that radio brochure, to get his fingerprints."

Will Randlely dived to retrieve from the floor that shiny-papered brochure which Daisymae had been holding before she fainted.

"Got to save this. It's got Flinn's fingerprints on it!"

"Don't bother," Daisymae said. "I just guessed that he had left prints on it. He gave himself away by running."

Captain Michaelford glared at her.

"But there are *latent* prints on that paper," Daisymae said, salving Michaelford's professional ego. "I'm sure you can make them visible in your lab, Captain."

I finished my examination of Flinn, and straightened up.

Cold sweat was beaded on his livid forehead.

"What're my chances, Doc?"

"Offhand, I'd say they're good," I told him.

He caught a shuddery breath, and said:

"In that case, I'll talk."

MICHAELFORD nodded to the Homicide detective, and the latter drew pen and pad from a pocket.

Izzy said, "Never mind that. I've got the recorder running. It'll all be down on a platter."

"What!" It was Mike who let out that gasp. Gray defeat on his keen face faded before a hot flush of excitement. "Izzy, y-you—you mean that recorder's been running all the time?"

"Since the fireworks started," Izzy admitted.

Anticipation burned in Mike's eyes. "It's terrific," he breathed. "Oh, Lord, what a broadcast that'll make!"

Michaelford bent over Ed Flinn. "All right, Flinn."

"First off," Flinn began unsteadily, "I want to say that I didn't stab Mrs. Midleigh, or kill that Filipino house-boy. I'm not a killer."

I said: "Your fingerprints were on the knife that killed Natalie Midleigh."

"Yes. I must've left 'em there when my partner gave me the knife to get rid of. I was careful to wipe *his* prints off the handle. He stabbed Mrs. Midleigh, not me."

"So you had a partner?"

"Yeah. After he killed Mrs. Midleigh, he discovered that the house-boy had been looking in from the hall. So he got rid of the Filipino. Later he killed Lucius Midleigh, too."

Michaelford growled: "Begin at the beginning, will you?"

"I didn't want to go into this racket," Flinn said. "Nolane put the screws on me."

"Nolane!" I gasped. "You s-said Nolane!"

"Uh-huh. Don't make me repeat things. I don't feel so good."

"But, man alive! Terence Nolane was a Federal cop!"

Flinn's bloodless lips twisted.

"Yeah. With a little tin box full of high-priced bonds, and his suitcase always packed for a quick get-away."

Captain Michaelford repeated stolidly: "Start at the beginning."

"All right. Nolane, being a Treasury man, was on the inside. When tips came in, or the records showed that somebody was hiding assets so's to avoid paying income tax or import duties or other taxes, he used those tips to do himself good."

"How?" I asked.

"If you give an information on somebody who's smuggled—well, diamonds, for instance, into the country, and that person is convicted, the Government'll give you ten per cent of the value of the stuff. Or if you pass the word on somebody who's listing just part of his property on the tax forms, and not telling what he's got hid in a safe-deposit box."

"But Nolane couldn't collect rewards. He was an official."

"That's why he had to have a partner. His partner would seemingly be the man exposing the tax-dodgers."

"BUT you were *blackmailing* Midleigh?" I put in.

"Yeah. That was part of the set-up. Nolane would get a line on somebody dodging taxes or avoiding duty payments, or—like it was in this case—hoarding gold coin. Then we'd work on the sucker. Shake 'im down. We had Lucius Midleigh paying us two hundred and fifty dollars a month regular, for a year and a half. Then, when a sucker would run out of dough or get stubborn, I'd 'expose' 'im to Nolane, and Nolane would make the pinch. I'd get the reward and give it to Nolane, and take my stingy split."

"Nolane never let the sucker know he was in on the shakedown?"

"Couple times Nolane did step into the game, when it got snarled up on me. We figured Midleigh was safe. He was so *damned* scared. But we figured wrong on Mrs. Midleigh. She made all the trouble."

Flinn had to pause a moment. We waited, our shocked mind full of what he'd disclosed.

"It was Mrs. Midleigh," Flinn resumed, "who got Midleigh to hoard that gold instead of turning it in to the Treasury department for the Midleigh estate."

"Trouble was, Mrs. Midleigh hated to pay us that shake-down money. And she was smart enough to know there'd be no end to our shakedown. So she told me and Nolane that she was through payin' off."

"But she offered us a proposition. Through Lucius Midleigh, it was. They'd pay us fifty grand when they converted the gold into money. In return, we'd have to give Midleigh a paper—"

"A confession?" Michaelford demanded.

"That's what it amounted to. They were to hold that as a guarantee that we'd keep the bargain. And if we refused the proposition—then she was going to blow the whole works."

"She wouldn't've done that!" Michaelford snapped.

"Captain, she'd've spilled the whole game right into your lap. It would be Lucius Midleigh who'd go to prison, and me and Nolane, not Mrs. Midleigh. She didn't mind throwin' Lucius to the wolves."

"So?" Michaelford prompted.

"Nolane kept stallin'. Thinkin' back, I guess he was planning to kill her, but was hunting for a smart way to do it."

"Yesterday morning, early, we went to the Midleigh house. We went on account of Midleigh had phoned us that Dr. Roger Lathburn had come to town. If Lathburn asked him for an accounting of the estate, Midleigh wanted to have his story all fixed."

"We got there at breakfast-time. Mrs. Midleigh, she was ready for a showdown. So was Nolane. He'd done his figurin'. There was some tough talk. Nolane made Mid-

leigh get out of the house. Mrs. Midleigh, she grabbed for the phone. Nolane slapped her down. She pulled open a table drawer—going after a gun, maybe—and Nolane stabbed her.”

Flinn shut his eyes in weakness a moment.

“Then what?” Michaelford insisted.

“The Filipino had come running when Mrs. Midleigh screamed. Nolane went for him. Used his gun-butt. . . . Then we got busy. Nolane knew about Dr. Lathburn, and we tried to fix the killing on him. You know about that. And Nolane—he put the Filipino in his car. Aimed to dump him somewhere. And he sent me to the radio station here, to see that Midleigh didn’t talk.”

I prompted: “So it was Nolane who tried to kill me in a car wreck?”

“Yeah. He figured to get the Filipino blamed for that.”

“Why did Nolane want me killed?”

“Captain Michaelford didn’t seem to be fallin’ for the frame on you. We figured if you got killed in a car accident, it might wind up the case without much more investigatin’. I guess Nolane was doin’ what looked like a good idea at the time. . . . Then, when the frame on you didn’t work, Nolane figured we had to change tactics. Nolane decided to make it look as if the whole trouble was on account Midleigh was gyppin’ Doc Lathburn out of money left him by his father. That was why we wanted Doc Lathburn to find his birth-certificate provin’ he was Midleigh’s own son.”

Michaelford asked: “Why did Nolane kill Lucius Midleigh?”

“We finally realized he wouldn’t keep his mouth shut if you cops worked on him.”

I said: “You figured to make it look as if I killed Lucius, too?”

“The set-up looked just ripe for that. Nolane was waiting in Midleigh’s house. We’d told Lucius to come. You came—and you found the gold coin where Lucius had hid the stuff. Right then, we figured we had everything wound up just nice. Hell, you even had a gun! Nolane figured to kill you and Lucius both—and then to say that he’d tried to arrest you when you’d actually proven your guilt by starting to take the gold, and that you’d put up a fight. That you’d killed Midleigh before Nolane was able to put a bullet into you. Result of that would’ve been that both you and Midleigh would’ve been eliminated—and Nolane would’ve got bouquets from his Department for breaking a gold-hoarding case. But you spoiled that. You got Nolane first.”

“When did he kill Midleigh?” Michaelford asked.

“Right after Doc Lathburn shot at Nolane and Midleigh. Nolane knocked Midleigh down with the barrel of his gun. Nolane planned, after he’d got Lathburn, to empty Lathburn’s gun into Midleigh.”

“How come Midleigh’s body was found in a ditch outside?”

“I did that. I thought Midleigh was just unconscious, and I started to take him away. I didn’t want him to talk. But by the time I got him into my car, I realized that Nolane had done for him with that wallop. So I dumped him first likely spot I found.”

“Why did you come back here tonight?”

FLINN’s white lips twisted wryly again. “I was nuts. But I figured I’d kept myself in the clear. I figured that now I could keep that pile of gold coins for myself. But I wanted to be sure. I came here to find out how things were winding up.”

He finished in a whisper—worn out by talking.

I looked at Michaelford. Glared, I guess. And I demanded: “You convinced now, that I shot Nolane in self-defense?”

He frowned and pulled at his lip, but nodded, and admitted: “Yeah, I guess you can make that stick.”

Daisymae breathed a long, tremulous sigh of heartfelt relief. I just stood there, suddenly wordless and numb with reaction, but feeling thankfulness glow and spread through me like the warmth of a slug of fine whisky.

Only Izzy had words to mutter: “What the hell, Captain, you cops ought to give the Doc a medal!”

That eased everybody. Dr. Steuben started pumping my hand.

“I’m congratulating you, Roger! On being lucky enough to have Miss Laurens looking out for you. Marry her, son.”

Of course I turned red as a beet. Everybody laughed, but no doubt it was just by way of release from tension.

Dr. Steuben leveled a finger at Daisymae.

“Remember, girl. I’ll deliver ’em free if you promise four of ’em.”

“Five,” she said demurely.

Me, I said nothing. What did I care whether they’d be a little odd or not?

CAPTAIN MICHAELFORD got the gold from Flinn’s apartment and turned it over to the Treasury Department, and the Treasury officials stretched a point—maybe two-three points. Their final decision was that I had been in no degree culpable. That since I was Jerrold Midleigh’s next of kin, the money was mine. The executor of the estate *had* been guilty of violation of the statutes, but I had not. So they gave me legal tender for the full value of the gold. I have a hunch that another factor helped me: Very rarely do you find a dishonest man among the personnel of the Federal bureaus. Only once in a blue moon is there a secretary who pirates oil resources, or a sheriff who fills a tin box with gilt-edge securities. Mr. Terence Nolane was a departmental flaw that the chiefs wanted not only dead and buried but forgotten under a sepulcher whitened with much good for evil. So finally I came into my inheritance.

“You called me a silent partner in this radio station of yours,” I told Mike Norredge. “Not any more! I’m putting in cash to buy me a voice in its management. All the cash you’ll need. Okay, pal?”

For the second time I saw Mike struck dumb. But he wrung my hand, his lean, keen face aglow. . . .

Then I bought the finest three-carat diamond solitaire in the shop. I reserved seats at the best show in town, and the best table at the swankiest night-spot.

So that night we dined. We saw the show. Daisymae took a bow at the Troc. She enjoyed it all so much that she was just radiant.

I didn’t drive her straight home, then. I drove out to a hilltop with a view of an ocean of lights like a glamorous rainbow.

For a moment or so I couldn’t talk. Then I caught a full breath—and started. I talked hard: I told her that I was a man bemused; that without her I was worthless, but with her I could achieve miracles. I told her that I’d never really been in love like this before; that she had given the word new meaning for me; that all my hope of happiness on this earth was bound up in her—

She didn’t say anything. She had turned her face slightly away. Abruptly I choked up. I couldn’t go on.

“Daisymae, is it—Mike? You still want him?”

She caught a sharp little breath, and didn’t answer.

“You’ve got to tell me!” I said, grasping her shoulders and turning her toward me. “Is there a chance for me?”

She didn’t answer. And then I really knew an anguish of suspense; and I felt hollow with loss and disappointment. I drew back, with an effort to steady my nerves and my runaway feelings.

“Roger.”

Daisymae leaned toward me and lifted her lips—and that kiss was all the answer I could want. And then and there I resigned myself to the fact that I was marrying a woman smarter than I am. But I was smart enough to be glad of it!

THE END

Readers' Forum*

(Continued from page 1)

AN ALL-OUT EFFORT

I have been working here at the Elwood Ordnance Plant for several months and I know that our plant, for one, is making an all-out effort toward supplying our fighting men.

I have seen a great many BLUE BOOKS being sold and read around here, and I think that the rest of the men will agree when I say that BLUE BOOK is making an all-out effort to portray, realistically, the fighting men for whom they, the workers, are making munitions.

Here's to a great magazine and to our soldiers, uniformed and civilian!

*Darrell Roberts,
Wilmington, Illinois*

TOO MUCH WAR FICTION?

Your new policy of better stories, more reading matter and no ads must, I feel sure, be making the circulation manager puff out his chest these days. Of course you will receive kicks now and then, but only minor ones. A magazine that pleased every one of its readers must necessarily appeal only to a limited class.

Here is my own feeble protest: I am beginning to detect a slight tendency of war hysteria in BLUE BOOK's contents. Of course we all know that Germans, Italians and Nipponese are villains of the deepest dye, who are incapable of anything decent, and whose extermination is desirable. But need these facts be rammed down our throats in every story? After all, one reads a magazine for entertainment, propaganda has no place in it.

The editorial retort may be: "Our readers demand this type of fiction."

I am inclined to doubt this. Even the armchair warriors and parlor patriots eventually tire of winning the war vicariously. There is a dreadful monotony about the plot where the gallant flyer shoots down six Jerry planes; where the sturdy little trawler rams a submarine; and that nasty grinning Jap who hisses politely, says "Arigato," and then ties up the hero and steals his bomb-sight, is becoming typed. Even roast turkey and cranberry sauce might become loathsome as a steady diet. Couldn't you side step the war in some of the yarns?

*B. W. Williams,
South Laguna, Calif.*

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion, for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words, no letters can be returned, and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York

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Back to the Sea, Viking!

The old flame burns in these young 1942 Norsemen, but they have a subtler and more dangerous battle to fight against the invader. . . . A complete book-length novel.

by DAVID N. BENEDICT

Omar the Black

A second and even wilder adventure of those two amusing villains—the Two Swordsmen of High Tartary.

by ACHMED ABDULLAH

Keep Them Playing

War-time baseball, with young fry and graybeards putting on a fearful and wonderful show.

by TALBERT JOCELYN

Danger Is My Meat and Drink

A pirate of pirates and a very gallant swashbuckler is the hero of this story by the author of "Desert Blood."

by HERBERT RAVENEL SASS

Diamonds from Canada

The banner of France is carried to the New World in this fourth of the "Flags of Our Fathers" series.

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The brilliant author of "The Bookshop" and "The Magic Staircase," at his fantastic best.

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